

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON GOD AND (OTHER) MONOTHEISM(S)

Edited by

Wahid M. Amin, Aaron W. Hughes & Sajjad H. Rizvi



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The *Tawḥīds* of Ibn Taymiyya

Jon Hoover

1. Introduction

The contemporary Salafi movement typically divides divine unicity (*tawḥīd*) into three kinds. The first is *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*, which is confessing the exclusivity of God's lordship (*rubūbiyya*) by affirming that God is the sole creator of all things. Second is *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*. The term *ulūhiyya* refers to God's divinity in the sense of God's right to be worshipped as a god, and *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* means demonstrating God's exclusive divinity by worshipping God alone. The third *tawḥīd* is *tawḥīd al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt*, which affirms the uniqueness and incomparability of God's names and attributes.¹ The terms *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* and *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* are readily traced back to the fourteenth-century Ḥanbali theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) who develops them in his writings.² However, scholars of contemporary Salafism have been reticent to credit Ibn Taymiyya with the third kind of *tawḥīd*, *tawḥīd al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt*. For example, Bernard Haykel in his 2009 study, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action', writes, 'The terms *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* and *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* appear to have been coined in Ibn Taymiyya's time,'³ but he does not speculate about the origin of *tawḥīd al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt*. Similarly, Henri Lauzière in his 2016 monograph, *The Making of Salafism*, states that Ibn Taymiyya elaborated the first two types of *tawḥīd* and then credits the eighteenth-century Arabian reformer Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792) with the third.⁴ There is good reason for this reticence. To the best of my knowledge, the expression *tawḥīd al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt* does not occur in Ibn Taymiyya's writings, and the threefold division of *tawḥīd* common among Salafis today is rare.⁵ Nevertheless, Ibn Taymiyya does have a lot to say about God's names and

1 Joas Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan: Political Islam in a Quietist Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 40–42; Bernard Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action', in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst, 2009), 38–40. On the contemporary Salafi doctrine of *tawḥīd al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt* specifically, see Mohammad Gharaibeh, *Zur Attributenlehre der Wahhābiya unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schriften Ibn 'Uṭaimīns* (1929–2001) (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2012).

2 Cole M. Bunzel, *Wahhābism: The History of a Militant Islamic Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), 128–38; Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 27–29, 121–22, 195; Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya* (London: Oneworld, 2019), 42–43, 48–49; Henri Laoust, *La profession de foi d'Ibn Taymiyya: Texte, traduction et commentaire de La Wāsiṭiyya* (Paris: Librairie orientale Paul Geuthner, 1986), 37; Henri Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taḳī-d-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taimiyya, canoniste ḥanbalite né à Ḥarrān en 661/1262, mort à Damas en 728/1328* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1939), 472–73.

3 Haykel, 'Salafi Thought and Action', 39.

4 Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 210.

5 Gharaibeh, *Zur Attributenlehre*, 1, states that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb adopts the threefold scheme of *tawḥīd*

attributes,⁶ and it has been shown that contemporary Salafis draw from his works to articulate their views on this aspect of their theology, especially from his *Wāsiṭiyya* creed, his anti-Ashʿarī *Ḥamawīyya*, and his *Tadmuriyya*, an overview of theological doctrine.⁷ This then raises the question of how Ibn Taymiyya conceptualises *tawḥīd* if not according to the three kinds of contemporary Salafism.

In this study I will show that Ibn Taymiyya gives theological primacy to a division of *tawḥīd* into two kinds that is linked to a distinction in Arabic linguistics between informative speech (*khābar*) and performative speech (*inshāʾ*).⁸ These two kinds of *tawḥīd* do not correspond to Ibn Taymiyya's well-known *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* (or *ilāhiyya*) and *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*. Instead, the kind of *tawḥīd* linked to performative speech encompasses both of those *tawḥīds*, while the kind linked to informative speech corresponds to what eventually becomes known as *tawḥīd al-asmāʾ wa-l-ṣifāt*. Ibn Taymiyya's twofold *tawḥīd* and its linkage to informative and performative types of speech are readily evident in his *Tadmuriyya* and a few other works. Using *Tadmuriyya* as my basis for analysis, I will explore Ibn Taymiyya's two primary *tawḥīds* and then add some notes on the evolution of *tawḥīd* terminology up through Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb to show how Ibn Taymiyya's scheme was de-emphasised to make way for the threefold division better known today.

from Ibn Taymiyya, but he does not provide explicit evidence for this regarding *tawḥīd al-asmāʾ wa-l-ṣifāt*. Likewise, Laoust, *La profession*, 37, says that Ibn Taymiyya sometimes uses this expression, but he does not provide any evidence. Ibrahim Kalin, 'Will, Necessity and Creation as Monistic Theophany in the Islamic Philosophical Tradition', in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, ed. David B. Burrell, Carlo Cogliati, Janet M. Soskice, and William R. Stoeger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 111, reports that Ibn Taymiyya adds *tawḥīd al-asmāʾ wa-l-ṣifāt* to the other two *tawḥīds* in his refutation of Shīʿism, *Minhāj al-sunna*; however, Kalin does not provide a reference, and I was not able to locate it. The only instance that I have found of Ibn Taymiyya outlining three types of *tawḥīd* in modern Salafī fashion is in *Sharḥ al-iṣbahāniyya*, ed. Muḥammad b. ʿAwda al-Saʿawī (Riyadh: Maktabat Dār al-Minhāj, 2009–10), 107: 'Discussion of *tawḥīd* includes three kinds. The first of them is discussion of the attributes. The second is *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* and clarification that God is creator of everything. The third is *tawḥīd al-ilāhiyya*, which is worshipping God alone without associate.'

- 6 See Farid Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya und die Attribute Gottes* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019); for an English translation, see *Ibn Taymiyya and the Attributes of God*, trans. Carl Sharif El-Tobgui (Leiden: Brill, 2024).
- 7 See the index entry 'Ibn Taimiya', in Gharaibeh, *Zur Attributenlehre*. See also Michael Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith: Migration, Education, and the Wahhabi Mission* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 137–43; Alexander Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria: Islam, Preaching, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 40–43, 61.
- 8 In translating *khābar* as 'informative speech' and *inshāʾ* as 'performative speech' I follow David Vishanoff, 'Informative and Performative Theories of Divine Speech in Classical Islamic Legal Theory', in *Philosophy and Language in the Islamic World*, ed. Nadja Germann and Mostafa Najafi (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), 183–208. Modern scholars of Arabic linguistics observe that the term *inshāʾ* maps onto the notion of performative utterances in J. L. Austin's speech act theory. Performative utterances are words that perform actions by their very pronouncement. They do not just provide information. A man who says to his wife 'I divorce you', for example, is not merely providing information about the status of his wife. He is enacting a divorce. See further J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); Daniela Rodica Firanescu, 'Speech Acts', in *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, ed. Kees Versteegh, Mushira Eid, Alaa Elgibali, Manfred Woidich, and Andrzej Zaborski, 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2006–9); 4:328–34; Pierre Larcher, 'Inshāʾ', in *ibid.*, 2:358–61.

2. Informative Speech (*Khābar*) and Performative Speech (*Inshā'*)

Tadmuriyya takes up just over 140 pages in *Majmū' fatāwā*, the modern thirty-seven-volume compilation of Ibn Taymiyya's short- and medium-length writings.⁹ The title *Tadmuriyya* derives from name of the Syrian city Palmyra (*Tadmur*). It is not known why the treatise was given this title, but Ibn Taymiyya does explain that he wrote it in response to a request for the contents of one of his teaching sessions on two principles. The first principle is God's 'unicity and attributes' (*al-tawhīd wa-l-ṣifāt*), and the second is God's 'legislation and determination' (*al-shar' wa-l-qadar*). Ibn Taymiyya then seeks in *Tadmuriyya* to provide a comprehensive hermeneutical framework for interpreting the theological content of divine revelation by elaborating the two principles in terms of two kinds of speech and then two fundamental types of *tawhīd*. He begins elucidating the two principles with the following linguistic analysis in the introduction to the treatise.

Discussion of the category of unicity and the attributes comes under the category of informative speech (*khābar*), which has to do with negation and affirmation, and discussion of the category of legislation and determination comes under the category of request and will (*al-ṭalab wa-l-irāda*), which has to do with desire and love [on the one hand] and loathing and hate [on the other], negatively and affirmatively. A human being knows instinctively (*fī nafsihī*) the difference between negation and affirmation or deeming someone truthful and deeming someone a liar [on the one hand] and love and hate and prompting and preventing [on the other]. The difference between the one kind and the other kind is even known by the commoners and the elite (*al-ʿamma wa-l-khāṣṣa*), as well as by different types of scholars. The jurists mention this when discussing oaths, and linguists – students of theory, grammar, and rhetoric – also mention it; they mention that speech is of two kinds: informative (*khābar*) and performative (*inshā'*). Informative speech has to do with negation and affirmation, and performative speech with command or prohibition or permission.¹⁰

9 Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, in *Majmū' fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya* [hereafter: MF], ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim and Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad, 37 vols. (Riyadh: Maṭābi' al-Riyāḍ, 1961–67), 3:1–128 (including 15 pages paginated *alif-sin* inserted between pp. 88 and 89; references will follow the pagination of this edition); Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Tadmuriyya: taḥqīq al-iḥbāt li-as mā' wa-l-ṣifāt wa-ḥaḥiqat al-jam' bayna al-qadar wa-l-shar'*, ed. Muḥammad b. 'Awda al-Sa'awī (Riyadh, 1985); French translation: Ibn Taymiyya, *La lettre palmyrénienne (Tadmuriyya)*, trans. Abu Soleiman Al-Kaabi ([Paris]: Nawa, 2014). The date of *Tadmuriyya* is unknown. Laoust, *La profession*, 32, suggests that Ibn Taymiyya wrote *Tadmuriyya* sometime after his release from prison in Cairo in 1307, but he gives no evidence for this conjecture. The text probably does not come from the very latest period of Ibn Taymiyya's life because he mentions it in another treatise, *Tafsīr sūrat al-'alaq*, MF 16:430 (reference to *al-Masā'il al-Tadmuriyya*). However, the date of *Tafsīr sūrat al-'alaq* itself is not known. Henri Laoust, 'Le Hanbalisme sous les mamlouks bahrides (658–784/1260–1382)', *Revue des études islamiques* 28 (1960): 23, also suggests that Ibn Taymiyya may have written *Tadmuriyya* for the Bedouin *amīr* Muḥannā b. 'Īsā (d. 736/1335–36), but Laoust provides no evidence for this.

10 Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:2.

In this passage, Ibn Taymiyya links the principle of God's unicity and attributes to the linguistic category of informative speech, which signifies statements that are affirmed or negated, and the principle of legislation and determination to request and will, that is, utterances that turn on love and hate and prompting and preventing. Furthermore, he adds, linguists speak of the two types as informative speech (*khavar*) and performative speech (*inshā'*).¹¹ The terminological pair *khavar* and *inshā'* had only come into use among Arabic linguists in the 1200s, but they had been discussed among legal theorists since the tenth century.¹²

Ibn Taymiyya says in the text above that *inshā'* has to do with command, prohibition, or permission. This could be understood to refer to God's legislative rulings for human beings only. However, this does not exhaust his understanding of *inshā'*. Ibn Taymiyya invokes a fuller meaning of *inshā'* outside *Tadmuriyya*. He writes, for example, 'Informative sentences conform to what is informed about. Performative speech necessitates the origination of what has not yet been.'¹³ Likewise, he says, '[Informative speech] is the manifestation of knowledge, and performative speech is the manifestation of deeds.'¹⁴ Ibn Taymiyya also includes both what God commands to exist ontologically and what God commands human beings to do legislatively within the realm of the performative: 'Speech is either performative or informative. Informative speech is true, not a lie. Performative speech – the command of ontological origination (*amr al-takwīn*) and the command of legislation (*amr al-tashrī'*) – is just and not unjust.'¹⁵

Back in the introduction to *Tadmuriyya*, Ibn Taymiyya implies both aspects of God's performative activity by linking *inshā'* to his second principle of legislation and determination. 'Determination' here refers to God's determination and creation of everything that exists, and it is functionally equivalent to God's command of ontological origination mentioned just above. God's performative speech then encompasses both God's legislative command and God's creation of all things.

11 Similar discussions of *khavar* and *inshā'* are found in Ibn Taymiyya, *Tafsīr sūrat al-ikhhlās*, MF 17:368–69; Ibn Taymiyya, MF 6:523 (references to MF without treatise names are to short unnamed texts); Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar' ta'arūḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 11 vols. (n.p.: n.d.), 5:205, 10:215. In other texts, Ibn Taymiyya extends the scope of *khavar* beyond God's unicity and attributes to include Qur'anic narratives about human salvation history; see Ibn Taymiyya, MF 17:207; Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar' ta'arūḍ*, 7:273; Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Amr bi-l-ma'rūf*, MF 28:121; Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawīyya fī naqḍ kalām al-Shī'a al-Qadariyya*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 9 vols. (Riyadh: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad b. Su'ūd al-Islāmiyya, 1986), 3:290.

12 Pierre Larcher, 'Les arabisants et la catégorie de "inshā": histoire d'une "occultation"', *Historiographia Linguistica* 20, no. 2–3 (1993): 259–60; Vishanoff, 'Informative and Performative Theories'.

13 Ibn Taymiyya, *Tafsīr sūrat al-kāfirūn*, MF 16:560.

14 Ibn Taymiyya, MF 20:74.

15 Ibn Taymiyya, *Tafsīr sūrat al-shams*, MF 16:245.

3. The *Tawhīd* in Knowledge and Statement and the *Tawhīd* in Intention, Will, and Deed

Continuing in *Tadmuriyya*, Ibn Taymiyya builds on the distinction between informative and performative speech to link his two principles to two types of *tawhīd*:

This being the case [that informative speech has to do with affirmation and negation and performative speech has to do with command, prohibition, and permission], the servant must affirm of God the attributes of perfection that must be affirmed of Him and negate of God what opposes this state [of perfection]. Regarding His judgements (*aḥkām*) [the servant] must affirm His creation (*khalq*) and His command (*amr*). He [must] believe in His creation, which includes the perfection of His power and the universality of His will, and affirm His command, which includes the explication of what He loves and what He is well pleased with in both speech and deed. He [must] believe in His legislation and His determination with a belief devoid of error. This [latter affirmation] involves exclusivity in worshipping [God] (*al-tawhīd fī 'ibādatihi*) alone, without associate. It is exclusivity in intention, will, and deed (*al-tawhīd fī al-qaṣd wa-l-irāda wa-l-'amal*). The first [affirmation] involves uniqueness in knowledge and statement (*al-tawhīd fī al-'ilm wa-l-qawl*), as the *sūra* 'Say! He is God, One' (Q. 112) indicates. The *sūra* 'Say! O, you unbelievers' (Q. 109) indicates [exclusivity in intention, will, and deed]. These are the two *sūras* of sincerity (*ikhhlāṣ*).¹⁶

Ibn Taymiyya here links informative speech and his first principle concerning God's attributes to the *tawhīd* in 'knowledge and statement', and he ties performative speech and his second principle concerning legislation and determination to the *tawhīd* in 'intention, will, and deed'. Ibn Taymiyya outlines these two *tawhīds* in similar fashion in two of his large works of theology, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya* and *Minhāj al-sunna*. In both tomes, he connects God's uniqueness in knowledge and statement (*al-tawhīd fī al-'ilm wa-l-qawl*) to God's oneness and the uniqueness of God's attributes, and he motivates this *tawhīd* with both the Qur'anic verse 'Say! He is God, One' (Q. 112:1) and the linguistic category of informative speech (*khbar*). Then, he explains that exclusivity in will and deed (*al-tawhīd fī al-irāda wa-l-'amal*) is about worshipping God alone without associate, and he associates this *tawhīd* with both the Qur'anic text 'Say! O, you unbelievers, I do not worship what you worship' (Q. 109:1–2) and the linguistic category of performative speech (*inshā'*).¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:2–3.

¹⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya fī ta'sīs bida'ihim al-kalāmiyya*, ed. Yahyā b. Muḥammad al-Hunaydi et al., 10 vols. (Medina: Majma' al-Malik Fahd, 2005), 3:140–42; Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna*, 3:290–91. Ibn Taymiyya speaks similarly of two kinds of *tawhīd* in *Iqtidā' al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jahūm*, ed. Nāṣir b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-'Aql, 2 vols., 2nd printing (Riyadh: Dār Ishbiliyyā, 1998), 2:394; al-

Ibn Taymiyya structures the whole of *Tadmuriyya* around the two types of *tawḥīd* that correspond to his two principles ‘unicity and attributes’ and ‘legislation and determination’, which are in turn rooted in the distinction between informative and performative speech.¹⁸ In what follows, I will examine the basics of how Ibn Taymiyya explains his two categories of *tawḥīd* in *Tadmuriyya* before turning to how they changed into the three distinct *tawḥīds* for which Wahhābism and Salafism are well known.

The first and longest part of *Tadmuriyya* treats the *tawḥīd* in knowledge and statement, which, at the very beginning of this part, Ibn Taymiyya also calls ‘uniqueness in the attributes’ (*al-tawḥīd fī al-ṣifāt*).¹⁹ I have not found the expression *al-tawḥīd fī al-ṣifāt* elsewhere in Ibn Taymiyya’s corpus, but it is evidently a forerunner to the later expression *tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa-l-ṣifāt* (the uniqueness of the names and attributes). Ibn Taymiyya structures his treatment of the *tawḥīd* of knowledge and statement into an introductory discussion, two principles, two examples, and a long conclusion (*khātima*) consisting of seven rules. I limit my examination below to the introductory discussion and the two principles. The examples and rules simply elaborate Ibn Taymiyya’s basic ideas, and it would take us too far from this study’s focus on types of *tawḥīd* to analyse them.²⁰

The second part of *Tadmuriyya* on the principle of legislation and determination deals with the *tawḥīd* in intention, will, and deed which, in the passage translated above, Ibn Taymiyya calls more briefly the *tawḥīd* ‘in worshipping [God]’. Ibn Taymiyya also speaks of the *tawḥīd* ‘in acts of worship’ (*ibādāt*) at the beginning of the second part of *Tadmuriyya*,²¹ and it is within this part that he discusses the better-known terms *tawḥīd al-ilāhiyya* and *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*, although not with the sophistication found elsewhere in his writings.²²

¹⁷ *Uqūd [Naẓariyyat al-‘aqd]*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamid al-Fiḳī (Cairo: Maktaba al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1949), 10; *Jawāb ahl al-‘ilm wa-l-īmān anna ‘qul huwa Allāh aḥad’ ta’dilu thulth al-Qur’ān*, MF 17:107, which reads, ‘[Divine unicity] is of two kinds: knowledge- and statement-based (*‘ilmī qawli*) and deed- and intention-based (*‘amali qaṣdī*).’

¹⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:3–88 and *alif-sīn* (first part), 3:89–128 (second part).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰ See Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya und die Attribute Gottes*, 215–27, for a full discussion of the principles, examples, and rules. Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy*, 49–52, 64–66, also discusses aspects of this material.

²¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:89.

²² Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh Buraykān, *Manhaj Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya fī taqrīr ‘aqīdat al-tawḥīd* (Riyadh: Dār Ibn al-Qayyim; Cairo: Dār Ibn ‘Affān, 2004), 173–74, states that Ibn Taymiyya’s *al-tawḥīd al-qawli al-‘ilmī* includes both the *tawḥīd* of God’s lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and the *tawḥīd* of affirming God’s names and attributes (*al-asmā’ wa-l-ṣifāt*) and that Ibn Taymiyya’s *al-tawḥīd al-qaṣdī al-‘amali* involves worship and God’s divinity (*ulūhiyya*). However, no persuasive evidence from Ibn Taymiyya’s writings is provided for subsuming the *tawḥīds* of both God’s lordship and attributes under *al-tawḥīd al-qawli al-‘ilmī*.

4. The *Tawhīd* in Knowledge and Statement: God's Attributes

In the first part of *Tadmuriyya*, Ibn Taymiyya defines the first type of *tawhīd*, the *tawhīd* in knowledge and statement or in God's attributes, as adherence to the traditionalist creedal conviction that revealed language about God is to be affirmed as it is. God is to be spoken of exactly as God speaks of Himself in revelation, and no distortion or stripping God of His attributes is permitted. At the same time, likeness and similarity between the attributes of God and the attributes of creatures are negated, and inquiry into the condition or modality (*kayfiyya*) of God's attributes must be avoided.

As for the first [category of *tawhīd*], which is uniqueness in the attributes (*al-tawhīd fi al-ṣifāt*), the principle in this category is that God is qualified by that which He has qualified Himself and by that which His messengers have qualified Him, negatively and affirmatively. What God has affirmed for Himself is affirmed, and what He has negated of Himself is negated. It is known that the way of the Salaf of the Community and its Imāms is affirming the attributes that He affirms without modalising [them] (*takyīf*) or likening [them to something else] (*tamthīl*) and without distorting [them] (*tahrīf*) or stripping [them] away (*taʿīl*) Their way involves affirming His names and attributes while negating likeness (*mumāthala*) with creatures – affirming without assimilating [Him to creatures] (*tashbīh*) and declaring [Him] incomparable (*tanzīh*) without stripping away [His attributes]. As He – Exalted is He – said, 'There is nothing like Him, and He is all-Hearing, all-Seeing' (Q. 42:11). In His statement 'There is nothing like Him' is a rejection of assimilation and likening, and in His statement 'He is all-Hearing, all-Seeing' is a rejection of heresy (*ilhād*) and stripping away.²³

Ibn Taymiyya then quotes numerous Qur'anic verses denying that God has partners or a son and affirming that God has names and attributes such as living, one, knowing, merciful, coming, sitting, and speaking.²⁴ After this, he accuses various groups of stripping God of His attributes, on the one hand, and likening God to what is impossible, non-existent, and inanimate, on the other. These groups include Aristotelian philosophers (*falāsifa*), Jahmīs, Qarmatīs, and Bāṭinīs. Ibn Taymiyya applies the label Jahmī to Mu'tazilī and post-classical Ash'arī *kalām* theologians who reinterpret God's names and attributes non-literally when their literal meanings suggest corporeality or temporality. The Qarmatīs and Bāṭinīs refer to Ismā'īlī Shī'īs whom Ibn Taymiyya pillories for saying that God is 'neither existent nor non-existent, neither living nor dead, neither knowing nor ignorant'.²⁵ He argues that the first negation in each pair is meant to avoid assimilating

²³ Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:3–4; translation adapted from Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 49.

²⁴ Ibid., 4–7.

²⁵ Ibid., 7.

God to created things and the second to avoid assimilating God to things that do not exist. He rejects this double negation as irrational and a distortion of God's revelation, and he claims that it assimilates God to things that are impossible because negating contradictories is just as impossible as combining them.²⁶ Ibn Taymiyya then turns to the philosophers, by whom he typically means Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and his followers. He criticises the philosophers for reducing God's attributes to nothing more than God Himself. For example, they identify God's knowledge with God and fail to distinguish God's knowledge from God's power and will. Ibn Taymiyya also faults the philosophers for describing God as an existent that in fact exists nowhere but in the mind.²⁷

Ibn Taymiyya's charge that the philosophers' God exists only in the mind may appear gratuitous and unwarranted. It is comprehensible, however, from within his own frame of reference. Ibn Taymiyya adheres to a materialist ontology that denies the existence of an intelligible realm outside the mind, and he affirms that all existents are perceptible by the human senses.²⁸ As I have shown elsewhere, Ibn Taymiyya's God is a concrete empirical entity that is spatially extended. This God is capable of being seen but is shielded from human view in this life.²⁹ It then follows for Ibn Taymiyya that theologians and philosophers who position God beyond space and time in an intelligible world effectively confine God to the human mind.

In *Tadmuriyya*, Ibn Taymiyya's rejection of an extramental intelligible world manifests itself most clearly in his denial of extramental universals. His explanation is worth quoting in full, as it well illustrates his 'nominalist' or perhaps better 'conceptualist' approach to universals: universals for Ibn Taymiyya have no real existence except as concepts in the mind.³⁰ This passage also raises the question of whether humans can speak meaningfully about God when terms applied to God and creatures share no common extramental

26 For a more charitable interpretation of Ismā'īlī double negation, see Khalil Andani's paper, 'Apophatic *Tawhīd*: A Philosophical Account of Shī'ī Ismā'īlī Theology', in the present volume.

27 Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:7–8. A little later, Ibn Taymiyya writes, 'Whoever says, "God does not have knowledge, strength, mercy, and speech, and does not love, is not well pleased, does not call, does not speak intimately (*nāḥā*), and does not sit" is stripping and denying [God's attributes] and likening God to non-existents and inanimate objects' (16).

28 Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation: A Study of Dar' ta'arud al-'aql wa-l-naql* (Leiden, Brill, 2020), 229–35. I owe the apt term 'materialist' to Mohammad Abu Shareea.

29 Jon Hoover, 'God Spatially Above and Spatially Extended: The Rationality of Ibn Taymiyya's Refutation of Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Aṣ'arī Incorporalism', *Arabica* 69 (2022): 626–74 (esp. 645–50); Jon Hoover, 'God as an Empirical Entity: The Expanded Scope of Sense Perception in Traditionalist Spatialism', in *Analytic Islamic Epistemology: Critical Debates*, ed. Ramon Harvey and Safaruk Chowdhury (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).

30 Wael B. Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyya against the Greek Logicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), xvi–xxiv, calls Ibn Taymiyya's rejection of real universals nominalism. Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya und die Attribute Gottes*, 106–19, argues that conceptualism is a better label for Ibn Taymiyya's approach to universals than nominalism on the grounds that nominalism rejects even mental universals. See also Anke von Kügelgen, 'The Poison of Philosophy: Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle for and against Reason', in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, ed. Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 291–97.

reference. This leads Ibn Taymiyya to reflect on the character of theological language.

When it is known by necessity that in existence is the Eternal and Necessary in Itself and the temporally originated, possible, and susceptible to existence and non-existence, it is known that each one is an existent (*mawjūd*). It does not follow necessarily from their coincidence in the designation ‘existence’ (*musammā al-wujūd*) that the existence of the one is like the existence of the other. Instead, the existence of the one is particular to it and the existence of the other is particular to it. Their coincidence in a general name does not require their mutual likeness in the designation of that term upon attribution (*idāfa*), particularisation (*takhṣīs*), qualification (*taqyīd*), and so forth.

No rational person says, ‘When it is said that the Throne is an existent and a gnat is an existent, the one is like the other due to the coincidence of the designations “thing” and “existence.”’ This is because there is no existent thing in extramental reality apart from these two in which both participate (*yashtarikān fīhi*). Instead, the mind apprehends a shared universal meaning (*ma’nā mushtarak kullī*), which is the designation of the unqualified term (*al-ism al-muṭlaq*). When it is said that two things are existents, the existence of each one of them is particular to it, and nothing else participates in it with it, even though the term [‘existence’] is a reality (*ḥaqīqa*) in each one of them.

Therefore, God designated Himself with names, and He designated His attributes by His names. Those names are particular to Him. If they are attributed to Him, nothing else participates in them with Him. He [also] designated His creatures with names particular to them and attributed to them. These names coincide when sundered from attribution and particularisation. It does not follow necessarily from the coincidence of two names, the mutual likeness of their designations, and their identity when unqualified and abstracted from attribution and particularisation that the two [existents] coincide. The designation is not alike upon attribution and particularisation, not to mention that the two objects of designation do not become identical upon attribution and particularisation.

God called Himself ‘Living’. He said, ‘There is no God but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting’ (Q. 2:255). He also called some of His servants ‘living’. He said, ‘He brought forth the living from the dead, and He brought forth the dead from the living’ (Q. 30:19). The ‘Living’ is not like the ‘living’ because His statement ‘Living’ is a name for God particular to Him, and His statement ‘He brought forth the living from the dead’ is a name for the living creature particular to it. The two [names] coincide only when unqualified and abstracted from particularisation. However, what is unqualified has no existent object of designation in the extramental world. Even so, the intellect grasps from what is unqualified a sense (*qadr*) that is shared

between the two names. Upon particularisation, that [sense] is qualified by that which the Creator is distinguished from the creature and the creature from the Creator.

This applies necessarily to all of God's names and attributes. They are understood through what the name indicates by way of univocity (*muwāṭʿaʿa*) and coincidence (*ittifāq*) and what it indicates by way of the attribution and particularisation that prevent the creature from participating with the Creator in any of His particularities – Glory be to Him, Exalted is He.³¹

Again, for Ibn Taymiyya, only particulars exist in extramental reality. So, while he allows attribution of terms like 'existence' and 'living' to both God and creatures in this text, he denies the existence of extramental universals called 'existence' and 'living' in which both God and creatures participate. So, at first glance, Ibn Taymiyya appears to regard theological language as equivocal; God's 'Living' has nothing in common with a human being's 'living' except the name. Yet, he also affirms that human minds grasp a certain univocal and shared sense (*qadr*) or a universal meaning (*ma'nā kullī*) in terms such as 'existence' and 'living' when unqualified and unparticularised. These meanings are universal only in the mind, and when attributed to God and particular creatures, the universality of the meaning in the human mind gives way to the particularity of the extramental world such that the 'existence' of God is unlike the 'existence' of the creature and God's 'Living' is particular to God and the 'living' of creatures particular to them. Elsewhere in his writings, Ibn Taymiyya explains that terms like 'existence' are univocal in the sense of having a universal meaning in the mind but subject to modulation (*tashkik*) according to precedence and worthiness when ascribed to extramental particulars. For example, that which is necessary is all the worthier of 'existence' than that which is possible, and so God, who is necessary, is all the worthier of 'existence' than creatures, who are merely possible.³² The notion of the modulation of existence goes back to the

³¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:9–11.

³² For elaboration, see Hoover, 'God Spatially Above', 648–49; and the section 'Theological Language' in Jon Hoover, 'Ibn Taymiyya', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-taymiyya/>. My analysis of Ibn Taymiyya on the referentiality of theological language has changed since my 2007 monograph, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*. In that work, I gave great weight to Ibn Taymiyya's assertions that God's names and attributes are completely unlike the attributes of creatures and so drew the conclusion that Ibn Taymiyya's theological discourse 'does not correspond to anything humans experience in concrete reality' (53). That is, theological language is equivocal. The role of theology then is merely practical, that is, to nurture religious belief and piety, not to provide meaningful knowledge of God. It has now become clear to me with the publication of my 2022 article, 'God Spatially Above', that the meanings of God's attributes in Ibn Taymiyya's theological discourse do connect to the concrete reality of human experience in some fashion. God's overness (*ʿulūw*), for example, most definitely means that God is an empirical existent located outside the universe spatially. God is not found inside the universe or in some dimension outside space and time. However, the meanings of terms applied to God and creatures are modulated according to the particularities of each, and this introduces a degree of ambiguity into the theological project that to Ibn Taymiyya's mind respects the unlikeness of God.

philosopher Ibn Sinā, and it is found in post-classical Muslim theologians and philosophers working in his wake.³³

Back in *Tadmuriyya*, Ibn Taymiyya consolidates his explanation of the *tawhīd* of knowledge and statement into two principles: (1) the equivalent reality of all God's attributes and (2) the uniqueness and distinctness of the attributes. The first principle states, 'What is said about one of the attributes is likewise said about another.'³⁴ This principle opposes the *kalām* practice of rejecting the plain senses of some divine attributes mentioned in revelation to avert assimilationism (*tashbīh*) and corporealism (*tajsīm*) while accepting others. Ibn Taymiyya provides the following example. Some *kalām* theologians affirm that God's attributes of life, knowledge, and power are literal or real (*ḥaqīqatan*), but they regard attributes like love and hate as non-literal or non-real (*majāzan*) to avoid assimilating God to creatures and then reinterpret them as God's 'will'.³⁵ Ibn Taymiyya counters that love, hate, will, knowledge, and power are all equally attributes of creatures and attributes of God. It is not acceptable to affirm will, knowledge, and power of God literally while reinterpreting God's love and hate as God's will. If it is objected that God's will is uniquely befitting of Him, then it is said that all of God's other attributes are also uniquely befitting of Him. For Ibn Taymiyya, all of God's attributes are equally real; there is no distinction between the literal and the non-literal.³⁶

The second principle underlines the uniqueness of God by negating likeness with creatures in God's essence, attributes, and acts. Ibn Taymiyya writes, 'What is said about the attributes is likewise said about the essence. There is nothing like God, neither in His essence nor in His attributes, nor in His acts. Since He has a real essence (*dhāt ḥaqīqa*) that is not like [other] essences, the essence is qualified with real attributes that are not like other attributes.'³⁷ Similarly, the modality (*kayfiyya*) of God's attributes and the modality of God Himself are equally unknown.³⁸

33 Damien Janos, 'Avicenna on Equivocity and Modulation: A Reconsideration of the *Asmā' Mushakkika* (and *Tashkik al-Wujūd*)', *Oriens* 50, no. 1–2 (2022): 1–62; Peter Adamson and Fedor Benevich, *The Heirs of Avicenna: Philosophy in the Islamic East, 12–13th Centuries: Metaphysics and Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 109–37.

34 Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:17.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 17–18, 23. Ibn Taymiyya rejects literalism as a theory of meaning, that is, he does not accept the notion that words were coined with an original meaning (e.g. 'lion' as a large cat) and then deployed with other non-literal meanings as well (e.g. 'lion' as a brave warrior). He instead adopts a pragmatic or contextual theory of meaning in which the meanings of words depend on their contexts (e.g. the word 'lion' has no meaning outside a particular context). From this perspective, Ibn Taymiyya's affirmation that all of God's attributes are equally 'literal' means that they are all equally real, not that they carry identical meanings when applied to God and humans. See further Mohamed M. Yunis Ali, *Medieval Islamic Pragmatics: Sunni Theorists' Models of Textual Communication* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 87–140; Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya und die Attribute Gottes*, 197–217.

37 Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:25.

38 Ibid.

As this second principle makes clear, Ibn Taymiyya is keen to deny all likeness between God and creatures, no doubt under pressure from Ash'arī *kalām* theologians who harangued him for assimilating God to creatures (*tashbih*).³⁹ Yet, he also observes that maintaining the utter uniqueness of God's attributes risks depriving theological discourse of its meaning in human language, and he explains that some meaning needs to be shared across the divine and human attributes for understanding to occur. He writes: 'Every name and attribute that you affirm must indicate a sense (*qadr*) that is univocal across the things named. Otherwise, the discourse would not be understood. However, we know that what is particular to God and distinguishes Him from His creation is greater than anything that occurs to the mind or the imagination.'⁴⁰ The full reality and the modality of God's names and attributes are beyond the reach of the human mind, but God's names and attributes do mean something in human language. However, Ibn Taymiyya devotes little effort in the rest of the first part of *Tadmuriyya* to explaining what that meaning might be.⁴¹ Instead, he simply refines the rules, that is, the grammar, of his theological discourse in dialogue with opposing currents.

5. The *Tawḥīd* in Intention, Will, and Deed: Acts of Worship

The second of the two major parts of *Tadmuriyya* explores the *tawḥīd* 'in acts of worship' (*fi al-'ibādāt*) which Ibn Taymiyya called the *tawḥīd* 'in intention, will, and deed' earlier in the treatise. This *tawḥīd*, he explains, includes not only believing and obeying God's revelation and command but also believing in God's creation and determination of all things: 'The second principle is the *tawḥīd* in acts of worship, which include belief in revelation (*shar'*) and determination (*qadar*) together.'⁴² Ibn Taymiyya cites texts from the Qur'an and the *ḥadīth* to support both God's creation and determination of all things and the obligation to worship, love, and obey God alone through the religion of Islam.⁴³ He explains that the pinnacle of Islam is confessing that there is no god but God by worshipping God alone and not associating anything with Him in worship.⁴⁴ Ibn Taymiyya devotes comparatively little of this discussion to the exclusivity of God's creative activity because he believes that this matter is not seriously contested. He says

39 On Ash'arī opposition to Ibn Taymiyya's approach to God's attributes, see Jon Hoover, 'Early Mamlūk Ash'arism against Ibn Taymiyya on the Nonliteral Reinterpretation (*Ta'wīl*) of God's Attributes', in *Philosophical Theology in Islam: Later Ash'arism East and West*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh and Jan Thiele (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 195–230.

40 Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:24.

41 For the meanings that Ibn Taymiyya gives to various attributes of God, see Hoover, 'God Spatially Above'; Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya und die Attribute Gottes*, 282–333; Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 107–28; Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, esp. 53–102, 211–28.

42 Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:89.

43 *Ibid.*, 89–94.

44 *Ibid.*, 94–96.

that even the associators (*mushrikūn*) of the Prophet Muḥammad's day confessed that God created all things.⁴⁵ With this as background, Ibn Taymiyya shifts to a discussion of *tawḥīd* in *kalām* theology. He writes:

The upshot of the great majority of *kalām* theologians who affirm *tawḥīd* in the books of *kalām* theology is that they deem *tawḥīd* to be of three types. They say, '[God] is one in His essence (*dhāt*) without division, one in His attributes (*ṣifāt*) without similarity, and one in His acts (*af'āl*) without associate.' The most prominent of the three types, according to them, is the third – the unicity of acts (*tawḥīd al-af'āl*) – which is that He alone is the creator of the world... They think that this is the desired *tawḥīd* and that this is the meaning of our statement 'There is no god but God', to the extent that they even deem the meaning of divinity (*ilāhiyya*) to be the power to originate (*al-quḍra 'alā al-ikhtirā'*).⁴⁶

The tripartite theological division of essence (*dhāt*), attributes (*ṣifāt*), and acts (*af'āl*) goes back to Ibn Sīnā who mentions it near the beginning of the metaphysics of the *Shifā'*. He also uses it to structure his *al-Risāla al-'arshiyya*.⁴⁷ Al-Ghazālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī then introduced this threefold division into Ash'arī *kalām* theology, and it was well established in *kalām* by Ibn Taymiyya's day.⁴⁸ However, Ibn Taymiyya's claim that *kalām* theologians speak of three types of *tawḥīd* as such appears to be mere assertion – I am not aware that this occurs in the *kalām* literature up to his time – and the expression *tawḥīd al-af'āl* may be of his own making. More generally, Ibn Taymiyya's propensity for forming compound expressions with *tawḥīd* may have been inspired by Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240). Ibn Taymiyya was familiar with Ibn al-'Arabī's writings, and he held them in positive regard before turning against the Sufi theorist at about the age of forty.⁴⁹ Ibn al-'Arabī formulated a wide range of expressions with *tawḥīd* in the chapter on thirty-six Qur'anic affirmations of God's unicity in his master work *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. Among Ibn al-'Arabī's compound *tawḥīd* expressions are *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* (unicity of divinity), *tawḥīd al-mashī'a* (unicity of the will), *tawḥīd al-ittibā'* (unicity of following),

45 Ibid., 96–97.

46 Ibid., 97–98; for a similar analysis, see Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar' ta'āruḍ*, 1:224–28.

47 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing: A Parallel English–Arabic Text*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 3; Ibn Sīnā, 'al-Risāla al-'arshiyya fī tawḥīdihi ta'ālā wa-ṣifātihi', in *Majmū' rasā'il al-Shaykh al-Ra'īs Abī 'Alī al-Ḥusayn b. 'Abd Allāh Ibn Sīnā al-Bukhārī* (Hyderabad: Maṭba'at Jam'iyyat Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1935).

48 Heidrun Eichner, 'The Post-Avicennian Philosophical Tradition and Islamic Orthodoxy. Philosophical and Theological Summae in Context' (Habilitationsschrift, Martin-Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 2009), 14, 16, 42, 46, 60, 129, 197–98, 281, 283–84, 295, 306–7, 320, 460–64, 493.

49 On Ibn Taymiyya's regard for several of Ibn al-'Arabī's works, see his *Fī risālatihī ilā Naṣr al-Manbijī*, MF 2:464–65; the relevant paragraph is translated in Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 96.

tawhīd al-Rabb (unicity of the Lord), *tawhīd al-amr bi-ʿibāda* (unicity of the command to worship), and *tawhīd al-nuʿūt* (unicity of the [divine] characteristics).⁵⁰ The facility with which Ibn al-ʿArabī crafted such a vast array of *tawhīd* expressions provided subsequent generations a deep reservoir from which to adapt and compound their own expressions according to need and utility.

Following the passage from *Tadmuriyya* quoted above, Ibn Taymiyya explains that the *tawhīds* of the *kalām* theologians contain both truth and falsehood. He agrees with the Ashʿarī *kalām* theologians' affirmation of *tawhīd* in God's acts, which he also calls *tawhīd al-rubūbiyya* (unicity of lordship), but he faults them for making this *tawhīd* the primary focus of theology. To his mind, affirming God's exclusive creation of the world is unexceptional, and even the Arab associators of the Prophet's time did not dispute that. Regarding the *tawhīd* of the attributes, Ibn Taymiyya restates views found in the first part of *Tadmuriyya*. God is unlike any created thing, but there is nevertheless a shared sense in terms like 'existence' that are attributed to both God and created things. He then criticises the Muʿtazilīs and others for stripping away the ontological reality of the multiplicity of God's attributes in the name of their erroneous *tawhīd* of God's absolute numerical oneness. With respect to the *tawhīd* of God's essence, Ibn Taymiyya agrees with the *kalām* theologians that God is not divisible, but he censures them for thinking that this *tawhīd* entails denying that God is over His Throne and distinct from the world in a spatial sense.⁵¹

These quibbles aside, Ibn Taymiyya's primary complaint about the *kalām* theologians in *Tadmuriyya* is that their *tawhīd* ignores worship. The words 'god' (*ilāh*) and 'divinity' (*ilāhiyya*) do not signify the power to originate, as the *kalām* theologians think, but rather the right to be worshipped as a god: 'The true God is He who has the right to be worshipped.'⁵² Ibn Taymiyya insists that God's legislation, command, and prohibition should be prioritised over God's creation, lordship, and determination, and he explains that two principles derive from the Muslim confession of faith, 'There is no god but God, and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God'. The first principle is the *tawhīd* of divinity (*tawhīd al-ilāhiyya*), which means worshipping God alone without resort to intercessors, and the second is the Messenger Muḥammad's right to be obeyed.⁵³ Both principles focus on right action and not on the mere belief that God is the sole creator, that is, not just on *tawhīd al-rubūbiyya*.

To sum up, Ibn Taymiyya outlines two fundamental *tawhīds* in *Tadmuriyya* with the second consisting in two further kinds. The first fundamental *tawhīd* is in knowledge and

50 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 2:405–21 (*al-faṣl al-tāsiʿ*); for a summary of this chapter, see Mohd Sani Badron, 'Ibn al-ʿArabī on Affirming the Oneness of Allah's Divinity (*al-Tawhīd*)', *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 11, no. 1 (2010): 55–106.

51 Ibn Taymiyya, *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:98–101.

52 Ibid., 101.

53 Ibid., 101–10; the remainder of *Tadmuriyya* outlines errors in relating God's creation and decree to God's command and legislation.

statement, and it deals with the theology of God's attributes. The second fundamental *tawhīd* is in intention, will, and deed, and it has to do with worship. The *tawhīd* of intention and will then encompasses the *tawhīd* of divinity, which consists of worshipping God alone without associate, and the *tawhīd* of lordship, which involves confessing that God is the sole creator. Ibn Taymiyya expands on his concern for the priority of worship elsewhere in his corpus using the terms *tawhīd al-ilāhiyya* and *tawhīd al-rubūbiyya*. He does not, however, use the term *tawhīd fī al-ṣifāt* or similar compounds elsewhere to denote his reflection on God's names and attributes, and the simplified threefold *tawhīd* of contemporary Salafism is rarely to be found in his works.⁵⁴

6. From Two *Tawhīds* to Three

Ibn Taymiyya's foremost student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) follows his teacher's conceptualisation of two primary *tawhīds*. He also introduces the idea that *tawhīd* is of three kinds although not quite the three kinds of contemporary Salafism. The following passage from Ibn al-Qayyim's late work of moral spirituality *Madārij al-sālikīn* illustrates this:

[Sūrat al-Fātiḥa] includes the three kinds of *tawhīd* that the messengers agreed upon – the blessings of God and His peace be upon them. There are two kinds of *tawhīd*: one kind in knowledge and belief (*al-ilm wa-l-i'tiqād*) and another kind in will and intention (*al-irāda wa-l-qaṣd*). The first is called the knowledge-based *tawhīd* and the second is called the intention- and will-based *tawhīd* because the first is linked to informing and knowing (*al-ikhbār wa-l-ma'rifa*) and the second to intention and will. There are also two kinds of this second [*tawhīd*]: a *tawhīd* in lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and a *tawhīd* in divinity (*ilāhiyya*). These are the three kinds. As for the *tawhīd* of knowledge, it has to do with affirming the attributes of perfection (*ṣifāt al-kamāl*) and with negating assimilation and likening (*al-tashbih wa-l-mithāl*) and exonerating [God] from defects and imperfections.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See n. 5 for the one instance that I have found.

⁵⁵ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, ed. Nāṣir b. Sulaymān al-Sa'awī, 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Qa-r'awī, Ṣāliḥ b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Tuwayjirī, Khālid b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ghunaym, and Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Khuḍayrī, 6 vols. (continuous pagination) (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṣumay'ī, 2011), 1:218–19; the elaboration of these three *tawhīds* extends to the end of the discussion of the Fātiḥa on p. 421. See also Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ranks of the Divine Seekers: A Parallel English–Arabic Text*, trans. Ovamir Anjum, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 114–17; my translation differs somewhat from Anjum's, and Anjum has not translated the latter third of the quotation. Note also that Anjum's two volumes extend to about the mid-point of *Madārij*. For the dating of Ibn al-Qayyim's works, see Livnat Holtzman, 'Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah', in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography II, 1350–1850*, ed. Joseph E. Lowry and Devin J. Stewart (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 202–23; Joseph Normant Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 95–103.

Ibn al-Qayyim's initial division of *tawḥīd* into a *tawḥīd* in knowledge and a *tawḥīd* in intention and will reflects Ibn Taymiyya's twofold *tawḥīd* grounded in the distinction between *khbar* and *inshā'*, and his subsequent division of the *tawḥīd* in intention and will into the two *tawḥīds* of lordship and divinity echoes Ibn Taymiyya as well. Ibn al-Qayyim then notes that the *tawḥīd* in knowledge has to do with affirming God's attributes of perfection. He does not mention here the expression 'tawḥīd of the names and the attributes' (*tawḥīd al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt*) used by modern-day Salafī scholars, but he does employ this expression a few pages later in *Madārīj al-sālikīn*. Summing up a discussion on the praise of God as evidence for the *tawḥīd* in knowledge, Ibn al-Qayyim writes, 'This is the proof of praise for the *tawḥīd* of the names and attributes (*tawḥīd al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt*).'⁵⁶ He also uses the similar expression 'tawḥīd of the names, attributes, and characteristics' (*tawḥīd al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt wa-l-nu'ūt*) in his earlier work *Shifā' al-'alīl*.⁵⁷ With this, Ibn al-Qayyim plants the seeds of later usage, but the expression 'names and attributes' does not displace 'informing and knowledge' as the primary way to articulate this *tawḥīd*. He remains under the sway of his teacher's two fundamental *tawḥīds* in knowledge and intention.

This changes with the later fourteenth-century Damascene Ḥanafī Ibn Abī al-'Izz (d. 792/1390), who appears to be the first in the Taymiyyan theological tradition to separate out the three *tawḥīds* of attributes, lordship, and divinity explicitly and give them primacy.⁵⁸ Ibn Abī al-'Izz wrote a commentary on the traditionalist Ḥanafī creed of al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933) that drew heavily on the theologies of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim. He thereby facilitated the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century appropriation of al-Ṭaḥāwī's creed into the Salafī canon of theological texts even though the creed itself does not always support Salafī views.⁵⁹ At the beginning of his commentary on the expression *tawḥīd Allāh* in al-Ṭaḥāwī's creed, Ibn Abī al-'Izz writes:

There are three kinds of *tawḥīd*. The first of them is discussion of the attributes (*al-kalām fī al-ṣifāt*). The second is the *tawḥīd* of lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and clarifying that God alone is the creator of everything. The third is the *tawḥīd* of divinity (*ilāhiyya*), which is the right of [God] – Glory be to Him, Exalted is He – to be

56 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārīj*, 1:226; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ranks*, 122–23. Ibn al-Qayyim also says towards the end of *Madārīj*, 'There are two kinds of [*tawḥīd*]: a *tawḥīd* in knowing and affirmation (*al-ma'rifa wa-l-ithbāt*) and a *tawḥīd* in request and intention (*al-ṭalab wa-l-qasḍ*). The first is affirming the reality of the essence of the Lord (*ḥaqīqat dhāt al-Rabb*) – Exalted is He – His names, His attributes, His acts, ...' (5:3827).

57 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Shifā' al-'alīl fī masā'il al-qadā' wa-l-qadar wa-l-ḥikma wa-l-ta'līl*, ed. Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ b. 'Alī al-Ṣam'ānī and 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-'Ajlān, 3 vols., 2nd printing (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṣumay'ī, 2013), 3:1341 (at the very end of *bāb* 26). The expression *tawḥīd al-dhāt* occurs in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Kitāb al-ṣawā'iq al-mursala 'alā al-Jahmiyya wa-l-mu'aṭṭila*, ed. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Dakhil Allāh, 4 vols. (Riyadh: Dār al-'Āṣima, 1987–88), 3:3938.

58 Bunzel, *Wahhābism*, 138.

59 Wasim Shiliwala, 'Constructing a Textual Tradition: Salafī Commentaries on *al-Aqida al-Ṭaḥāwīyya*', *Die Welt Des Islams* 58, no. 4 (2018): 461–503; Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith*, 139–41.

worshipped alone without associate.⁶⁰

The first kind of *tawhīd* concerns the attributes directly without mentioning its root in a *tawhīd* of knowledge and statement. The *tawhīds* of lordship and divinity are given separately without subsuming them under a *tawhīd* of worship or will and intention. After elaborating these three *tawhīds* over several pages, Ibn Abī al-‘Izz does mention and comment upon the Taymiyyan twofold *tawhīd* of ‘a unicity in affirmation and knowing and a unicity in request and intention’ (*tawhīd fī al-ithbāt wa-l-ma‘rifa wa-tawhīd fī al-ṭalab wa-l-qashd*).⁶¹ However, Ibn Taymiyya’s two *tawhīds* and the underlying distinction between informative speech (*khābar*) and performative speech (*inshāʾ*) no longer frame the overall discussion. Ibn Abī al-‘Izz has relegated them to a subsidiary role in this thinking, probably to simplify his commentary.

This is replicated four hundred years later in the theological writings of the Arabian Ḥanbalī reformer Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792) and Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Saffārīnī (d. 1188/1774), an anti-Wahhābī Ḥanbalī scholar from Nablus. Al-Saffārīnī outlines three kinds of *tawhīd* in *al-Anwār al-bahīyya*, a commentary on his own creedal poem, *al-Dhurra al-muḍīyya*, along the lines found in Ibn Abī al-‘Izz. There is no hint of Ibn Taymiyya’s two primary *tawhīds*, but the theology is otherwise Taymiyyan:

Know that there are three divisions of *tawhīd*: the *tawhīd* of lordship (*rubūbiyya*), the *tawhīd* of divinity (*ilāhiyya*), and the *tawhīd* of the attributes (*ṣifāt*). The *tawhīd* of lordship is that there is no creator, provider, giver of life, giver of death, giver of existence, and giver of non-existence except God – Exalted is He. The *tawhīd* of divinity is singling out [God] – Exalted is He – for worship, divinisation of Him, subjection, humility, love, and want [of Him], and turning towards Him – Exalted is He. The *tawhīd* of the attributes is describing God – Exalted is He – as He describes Himself and as the Prophet – God bless him and give him peace – describes Him by way of negation and affirmation, affirming of Him what He affirmed for Himself and negating from Him what He negated from Himself. It is known that the way of the Salaf of the Community and its leaders (*aʿimma*) is affirmation of what He has affirmed of the attributes without modality (*takyīf*) or likening (*tamthīl*), and without corruption (*taḥrīf*) or stripping [the attributes] away.⁶²

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb also mentions the same three-fold division of *tawhīd* near the be-

60 ‘Alī b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-‘Izz, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīda al-Ṭahāwīyya*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī and Shu‘ayb al-Arnāʾūṭ, 2nd printing (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1990), 1:24 (body of the text).

61 Ibid., 42.

62 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmiʿ al-anwār al-bahīyya wa-sawāṭiʿ al-asrār al-atharīyya: sharḥ al-Dhurra al-muḍīyya fī ‘aqīdat al-firqa al-marḍīyya*, 2 vols., 3rd printing (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Islāmiyya, 1991), 128–29. I am grateful to Sarah Van Eyken for drawing this reference to my attention.

ginning of a short treatise devoted to *tawhīd*: ‘*Tawhīd* is three principles: the *tawhīd* of lordship (*rubūbiyya*), the *tawhīd* of divinity (*ulūhiyya*), and the *tawhīd* of the essence, the names, and the attributes (*al-dhāt wa-l-asmā’ wa-l-ṣifāt*).’⁶³ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb devotes most attention to the *tawhīds* of divinity and lordship and gives very little space to the *tawhīd* of the essence, names, and attributes, but this third *tawhīd* gained more importance in later Wahhābism alongside the first two.⁶⁴

7. Conclusion

The three *tawhīds* of God’s attributes, lordship, and divinity going back to Ibn Abī al-‘Izz have become the dominant way of articulating the doctrine in Wahhābism and contemporary Salafism. The two *tawhīds* of lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and divinity (*ulūhiyya*) also go back to Ibn Taymiyya. However, Ibn Taymiyya articulates a more fundamental division of *tawhīd* into a *tawhīd* in knowledge and affirmation linked to the linguistic category of informative speech (*khābar*) and a *tawhīd* in intention, will, and deed linked to performative speech (*inshā’*). The first fundamental *tawhīd* concerns God’s names and attributes and is largely equivalent to the contemporary Salafī *tawhīd al-asmā’ wa-l-ṣifāt*, even though Ibn Taymiyya did not use that very expression. Ibn Taymiyya’s *tawhīd* in intention, will, and deed concerns worship of God and includes both *tawhīd al-ulūhiyya* and *tawhīd al-rubūbiyya*. With Ibn Abī al-‘Izz, al-Saffārīnī, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, and their successors, this Taymiyyan analysis of two fundamental types, with the second having two further types, falls away in favour of the simpler threefold scheme. Ibn Taymiyya’s fundamental twofold division is still known and discussed,⁶⁵ but it no longer provides the primary framing for the discussion of *tawhīd* in Salafism.

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63 ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim, ed., *al-Durar al-saniyya fī al-ajwiba al-Najdiyya: majmū‘at rasā’il wa-masā’il ‘ulamā’ Najd al-a’lām min ‘aṣr al-Shaykh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ilā ‘aṣrinā hādihā*, 16 vols., 6th printing (n.p., 1996), 2:66–73.

64 Bunzel, *Wahhābism*, 138.

65 See, for example, Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Āl al-Shaykh, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīda al-Taḥāwīyya* (al-Manṣūra: Dār al-Mawadda, 2011), 43, who mentions the twofold division within a wider discussion of the three *tawhīds* of lordship, divinity, and names and attributes.

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The Qur'anic Argument for Monotheism: Controversies between al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390) and His Contemporaries

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1. Introduction

If cosmic order implies the oneness of God, does the corrosion of heaven and earth imply the plurality of gods? While most people would readily give an affirmative answer to this question, the eighth/fourteenth-century Ash'arī theologian Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390) did not. Touching upon the very heart of the Islamic doctrine of monotheism, al-Taftāzānī's seemingly unorthodox position drew heated responses from later theologians and continued to spark debates down to the early twentieth century. The ensuing polemic, which reached its apex in the early decades of the ninth/fifteenth century, revolved around the meaning of the Qur'anic verse "If there were other gods [in heaven and earth] besides Allah, they would both dissolve into chaos"¹ (Q. 21:22) – a statement which, according to al-Taftāzānī, is just a kind of rhetorical argument (*hujja iqnā'iyya*) and, therefore, cannot be considered a conclusive proof for God's unity. While no one would doubt his commitment to the Islamic faith, al-Taftāzānī's remark has been considered a serious attack on the sacred text and the doctrine of divine unity (*tawḥīd*) so much so that the charge of unbelief was levelled against him by his contemporary 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Kirmānī (d. after 842/1439).

This article examines the controversy and attempts to reconsider the whole question in a somewhat new light by critically analysing al-Taftāzānī's arguments as well as those of his critics and defenders within the context of Sunnī Islam, including his disciple 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Bukhārī (d. 840/1437) and the exegetes Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854) of Iraq and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1332/1914) of Syria. It pays particular attention to the crucial points made by al-Taftāzānī in his theological work that led the detractors to reject his view and prompted others to defend his position, namely, the dispute whether the Qur'anic verse in question offers a demonstrative proof or nothing but a rhetorical argument for the oneness of God. In this study, after a brief introduction to his intellectual career, I shall identify why al-Taftāzānī's view differs from the standard opinion endorsed by his opponents with regard to the meaning of the counterfactual conditional statement used by the sacred text and how this leads him to reject the prevailing interpretation.

¹ Translation follows *The Noble Qur'an: Arabic Text and English Translation*, trans. Thomas B. Irving (Bratleboro: Amana Books, 1992), with slight modifications to ensure readability and accuracy.

2. Biographical Notes on al-Taftāzānī

Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd b. 'Umar b. 'Abd Allāh was born in Šafar 722 (March 1322) in Taftāzān, a village near Nasā in Qushkhaneh district, Shirvan county, North Khorasan province, Iran. Although little is known about his early life,² it is clear that as a young man he went to study at Herat, Gijduvan, Faryūmad, Gulistan, Khwarazm, Samarqand, and Sarakhs, where he eventually settled. Notable among his teachers were 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355) and Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Rāzī al-Taḥṭānī (d. 765/1365). According to Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), al-Taftāzānī was regarded as a leading scholar with whom 'science ended in the East' and 'no one could ever replace him', while Ibn al-'Imād al-Ḥanbalī (d. 1089/1679) mentions that during his student days, when he was just sixteen years of age, al-Taftāzānī outperformed his peers by composing a commentary on 'Izz al-Dīn al-Zanjānī's (d. 655/1257) textbook on Arabic morphology (*taṣrīf*).³

Al-Taftāzānī lived in a turbulent era. Both Khorasan and Khwarazm were overrun by the Turkic warlord Timur (d. 807/1405), whose rise to power and ensuing conquest are generally seen by historians as a revival of the Mongol tradition, albeit one infused with the values of a settled Islamic civilisation.⁴ Timur combined his profound and sincere allegiance to Islam with the ambitious political goal that was inspired by his twofold claim to Chingizid connection, on the one hand, and 'Alid descent, on the other. Nevertheless, like many Mongol rulers before him, Timur, who was 'much more familiar with the sword than with the pen', had high esteem for men of religion, both '*ulamā*', as well as Sufi hermits and ascetics. From his military expeditions across Eurasia, he often brought renowned scholars and poets back to his capital city Samarqand to add to the splendour of his court. Among the scholars drawn to Timur's orbit was al-Taftāzānī, who agreed to serve and work under the emperor's patronage in the years that followed.

Political upheavals notwithstanding, al-Taftāzānī managed to lead a quiet life of a scholar. At the apex of his career at Samarqand, he was able to produce a succession of treatises, many of which became quickly and permanently popular, on subjects ranging

2 Accounts of his life and works are given in Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina fi a'yān al-mī'a al-thāmina*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1993), 1:214; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-ghumr bi-abnā' al-'umr*, 3 vols. (Cairo, 1969), 389ff.; Ibn al-'Imād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fi akhbār man dhahab*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1979), 6:319; Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭālī bi-maḥāsīn man ba'd al-qarn al-sābi'*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, 1929), 2:303ff.; Aḥmad b. Muṣṭafā Ṭāškōprüzādeh, *Miftāḥ al-sa'āda wa-muṣbāḥ al-siyāda fi mawḍū'āt al-'ulūm* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1968), 1:205; Ghiyāth al-Dīn Khwāndamīr, *Tārīkh-i ḥabīb al-siyar*, 4 vols. (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Khayyām, 1954), 3:544, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, *Habībū's-siyar: The Reign of the Mongol and the Turk*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 301; Muḥammad al-Laknawī, *al-Fawā'id al-bahīyya fi tarājīm al-Ḥanafīyya* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, 1906), 135; C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* [henceforth: *GAL*] (Leiden: Brill, 1943–49), 2:215 (648), and Supplement, 2:301; Wilferd Madelung, 'al-Taftāzānī', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* [henceforth: *El2*] (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 10:88–89.

3 See Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, 4:350; Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, 8:547–48.

4 On Timur and his rule, see Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), 2:386–436; Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

from grammar and rhetoric, law and jurisprudence, logic and metaphysics, to theology and Qur'anic exegesis. While he used Arabic for the bulk of his writing, he was well-versed in other languages; he wrote his *tafsīr* in Persian and translated a volume of Sa'dī's poetry from Persian into Turkish. Despite his numerous works, al-Taftāzānī is best known for his commentary on *The Articles of Belief [or Creed]* (*'Aqā'id*) of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142).⁵ It is interesting to note that this creed is based on the Māturīdī school, while al-Taftāzānī is usually held to have been an Ash'arī. As noted by Watt, 'the reason is probably that he taught in a region where Māturīdī views were dominant. He expresses himself carefully, but there are a number of points where it is clear that he disagreed with the text he was commenting on.'⁶ Indeed, al-Taftāzānī's fame rests mainly on his commentaries on well-known textbooks in various field of learning, which came to be widely used in teaching at *madrasas* until modern times. Al-Taftāzānī goes through these brief texts – known as *mutūn* (sing. *matn*) – phrase by phrase, if not verbatim, explicating each point; often writing an essay on a word. Many of them received super-commentaries by later scholars.⁷

Al-Taftāzānī was upset and disappointed that Emperor Timur favoured al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) over him. As is well-known, despite his horrific image, Timur had a penchant for theological debates, in which he used to take an active part, arguing, in Ibn Khaldūn's phrase, about what he knew and also about what he did not know.⁸ The emperor's acute interest in such theological debates caused him to invite to his court prominent men of culture and learning.⁹ We are told that one day a debate was held at the presence of Timur, in which the participants were al-Taftāzānī and al-Jurjānī, who

5 Najm al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī was born in 460/1068 in Nasaf (Sogdian Nakhshab, now Qarsh/Қарши in Uzbekistan), a large city between the Oxus and Samarqand. One of the greatest jurists of the Ḥanafī school of his time, he died in Samarqand on 12 Jumādā al-Ūlā 537/4 December 1142. His creed (*al-'Aqā'id*) is preserved in copious manuscripts (e.g. MS Berlin 1953/4, MS Gotha 55.1, MS Tübingen 138.5) and was subject to numerous commentaries and glosses by (i) al-Taftāzānī (d. 791/1389), (ii) al-Khayālī (d. after 862/1458), (iii) Muṣliḥ al-Dīn al-Qaṣṭallānī (d. 907/1495), (iv) Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī (d. 926/1520), (v) Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī al-Harawī (d. 1014/1605); it has also been versified into a didactic poem as *Shiḡānat al-'Aqā'id* by Maṣṣūr al-Ṭablāwī (d. 1014/1605), *Nazm al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafī* by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Jawharī (d. 1215/1800), and *Idā'at al-dujunnā fi 'aqā'id ahl al-sunna* by Aḥmad al-Maqqarī (d. 1041/1632). See Brockelmann, *GAL*, trans. J. Lameer, 1:478–79 and Suppl. 1:787–88. For a modern edition of other commentaries, see *al-Majmū'a al-saniyya 'alā [sic] Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafīyya* (containing the *sharḥ* of Ramaḍān Afandī, al-Kastallī, and al-Khayālī), ed. Mar'ī Ḥasan al-Rashid (Mardin: Nūr Dār al-Ṣabāḥ, 2012) and *Shurūḥ wa-ḥawāshī al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafīyya*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2013).

6 William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1962), 154.

7 See Thomas Würtz, *Islamische Theologie im 14. Jahrhundert: Auferstehungslehre, Handlungstheorie und Schöpfungs-vorstellungen im Werk von Sa'd ad-Dīn al-Taftāzānī* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 57ff.

8 Walter J. Fischel, *Ibn Khaldun and Tamerlane: Their Historic Meeting in Damascus 1401 A.D./803 AH* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 47.

9 Edward Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 3:353.

was younger but equally distinguished scholar.¹⁰ At the end of the debate, Nu'mān al-Dīn al-Khwārizmī al-Mu'tazilī, acting as arbitrator, while admitting that he found both scholars to be equivalent in their knowledge of Islamic theology, eventually declared al-Jurjānī the winner. Legend has it that Timur justified his unfavourable decision towards al-Taftāzānī by stating that notwithstanding their equal erudition, al-Jurjānī still had an edge over al-Taftāzānī due to the former's noble lineage – that is, being a descendant of the Prophet's family. It is said that al-Taftāzānī was so humiliated by the decision that he returned to Sarakhs and soon died of chagrin.¹¹

That al-Taftāzānī's widely acclaimed commentary on al-Nasafī's creed continues to be taught in seminaries across the Muslim world until the present day is a clear testimony to his lasting impact. Already by the time of his death or very shortly afterwards al-Taftāzānī was being studied and appreciated as a scholar in Cairo, which was in those days some months distant from Samarqand or Khwarazm, where he taught and wrote. As noted by the historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) in his *al-Muqaddima* (Prolegomena): 'I found in Egypt numerous works on the rational sciences written by the well-known scholar Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, a native of Herat – a district in Khurāsān [*sic*]. Some of them are on the Kalām and the *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence), and rhetoric. They show that he had a profound knowledge (*malaka rāsikha*) of these sciences. Their contents demonstrate that he was also well versed in the philosophical sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-ḥikmiyya*) and far advanced in the rest of the rational sciences.'¹²

3. Moot Points

The cornerstone of the controversy was al-Taftāzānī's famous remark in his commentary on the creed of Najm al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142) pertaining to the oneness of God.¹³ In his words (Text 1):

10 A distant descendant of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) was a prolific scholar whose work covers a wide range of Islamic sciences from Qur'anic exegesis and *ḥadīth*, grammar and morphology, jurisprudence and theology, to logic and philosophy. On his life and legacy, see Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi' li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi'*, 12 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Quds, 1934), 5:328; al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-tālī'*, 1:488; A. S. Tritton, 'al-Djurdjānī', *EL2*, 2:602–3.

11 See Ibn al-Imād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, 8:547–48; Zafar I. Ansari, 'Taftāzānī's Views on *Taklīf*, *Ḡabr* and *Qadar*: A Note of the Development of Islamic Theological Doctrines', *Arabica* 16, no. 1 (1969): 65–66; Madelung, 'Māturīdiyya', *EL2*, 6:847–48.

12 Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 3:117.

13 The first Western edition of the text is in *Pillar of the Creed of the Sunnites: Being a Brief Exposition of Their Principal Tenets*, ed. William Cureton (London: Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1843), 34–37. The text has been translated into European languages: Andreas Müllerus, *Excerpta Manuscripti cuiusdam Turcici quod de Cognitione Dei et Hominis Ipsius, a quodam Azizo Nesephaeo Tataro scriptum est Turcice et Latine* (Brandenburg: Schulzius, 1665); Joseph Schacht, 'Das Glaubensbekenntnis des an-Nasafī', in *Der Islām, mit Ausschluss des Qor'āns* (= *Religionsgeschichtliches Lesebuch in Verbindung mit fachgelehrten*), ed. Alfred Bertholet, vol. 16 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1931), 81–86; 'Catechism of Abu-

The One – that is, the creator of the universe – is unique. The notion of the Necessarily Existent Being cannot be truly predicated except of one entity (i.e. God). The most well-known proof for the oneness of God among the Mutakallimūn is that of ‘mutual hindrance’ (*burhān al-tamānu*) as stated in the word of God, ‘If there were in the two of them [i.e. the heavens and the earth more] gods other than Allah, these two would have been ruined (*la-fasadatā*)’ (Q. 21:22). The explanation of this [proof] is as follows:

If two gods were possible, then mutual hindrance of each other would be possible, whereby one of them would will that Zayd move and the other that he should remain at rest, since each of the two things is possible in itself. In like manner the connection of the will with each of them [is possible], since there is no mutual opposition (*taḍādda*) between the two wills, but only [a mutual opposition] between the two things willed (*bayn al-murādayn*). So, in this case, either the two things would occur (*yaḥṣul al-amrāni*) and the two opposites would unite (*fā-yajtami‘ al-ḍiddāni*) [which is impossible], or else [if only one of the two things occurs] it follows that one of the two gods is powerless. But powerlessness is an indication of being originated and being contingent, as it implies shortcoming or need of something [else], therefore, [it is concluded that] plurality necessitates the possibility of mutual hindrance which [in turn] necessitates the impossible, and so it is impossible.¹⁴

In this passage al-Taftāzānī adduces what is otherwise known as the argument from ‘mutual exclusion’, or ‘proof from hypothetical mutual prevention’,¹⁵ or simply the ‘argument from opposition’.¹⁶ It consists of several premises and a conclusion, which may be arranged as follows: Either there is one god or there are many gods. If there were many gods, there would be conflict of interest, in which, for example, one god would want something to happen which another god does not will, so that they would oppose each other’s preference. If all or both refuse to concede, then two contradictory things will occur. Yet if one or more is able to defeat or dominate over the other god(s), then there would be powerless god(s). Since all these consequences are absurd, the antecedent premise (‘There are many gods’) is invalid, and with the second disjunct (i.e. proposition

Hafs Umar al-Nasafi’, trans. A. J. Wensinck, in *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 263–64; Duncan B. Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence, and Constitutional Theory* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), 308ff.

14 Sa’d al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafiyya* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2014); trans. Earl Edgar Elder, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam: Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī on the Creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 37–38.

15 See Benyamin Abrahamov, *On the Proof of God’s Existence: Kitāb al-Dalīl al-Kabīr of al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 16.

16 See Douglas Walton, Christopher Reed, and Fabrizio Macagno, *Argumentation Schemes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 250.

q ‘there are many gods’) being negated and declared false ($\sim q$ ‘there are NOT many gods’), the first disjunct (i.e. proposition p ‘there is only one god’) is affirmed to be true. On closer analysis, this argument turns out to be a mixed disjunctive syllogism¹⁷ containing a *modus tollens*,¹⁸ which can be symbolized thus:

$p \vee q$	
$q \rightarrow c$	p : There is only one god
$c \rightarrow m$	q : There are many gods
$\sim m$	c : Conflict (جمع الضدان)
$\sim c$	m : Impossible (محال)
$\sim q$	
$\therefore p$	

This argument was widely accepted by the majority of *mutakallimūn* across all schools of thought, including Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/935), Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 324/935), Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), the Mu‘tazilī al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) – to mention but a few – in their respective works.¹⁹ Taking the existence and uniqueness of God for granted, the *mutakallimūn* spared no effort to explicate the doctrine of *tawḥīd* articulated in the Qur’anic formula ‘there is no god but Allah’ (*lā ilāha illā Allāh*). Given his former theological training and affiliation to Ash‘arism, it is hardly astonishing that al-Taftāzānī would use the same argument of mutual exclusion (*dalīl al-tamānū‘*) to establish God’s oneness. What has attracted a remarkable amount of response from both supporters and detractors is his remark in the subsequent passage (Text 2):

17 The ‘disjunctive syllogism’ is one that has a disjunctive proposition (*qadīyya shartīyya munfaṣila*) in its major premise. A disjunctive proposition is one that possesses alternative predicates for the subject in which the conjunctive particle ‘or’ (sometimes accompanied by ‘either’ – in Arabic: *immā ... wa-immā...*) appears. For example, ‘Swans are either white or black’, ‘Arguments are either valid or invalid’, ‘The creator is either one or many’. The different things joined together by ‘or’ are called alternatives or disjuncts – the term indicating that we may choose between the things, and that if one is not satisfactory, we may pick the other, or one of the others if there is more than one alternative *other*.

18 Originally called *modus tollendo tollens* (the method that denies by denying), this is a valid form of inference by negating the consequent: ‘Given that q is false and it is true that if p then q , we may infer that p is false’ – which may be symbolised thus: ‘Given that $p \rightarrow q$ and $\sim q$, we may derive $\sim p$ as conclusion’. In our case, the argument is of the form p or q , not- q , so p . See Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 311.

19 See Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, *Kitāb al-luma‘* and *Risāla fī istiḥṣān al-khawḍ fī ‘ilm al-kalām*, in *The Theology of al-Ash‘arī*, ed. Richard J. McCarthy (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), 8 and 89; Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. Richard J. McCarthy (Beirut: University of Baghdad, 1957), 25, lines 13–20; Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. Fathalla Kholeif (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq Éditeurs, 1970), 40ff.; al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsa*, ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān (Cairo, 1965), 278ff.; Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-irshād* (Cairo, 1950), 53ff.; Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtīṣād fī al-‘itqād*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ḥubuqçı and Hussein Ātā (Ankara: Nur Matbaası, 1962), 40–44; Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām*, ed. and trans. Alfred Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 91ff.

You should understand that God's saying [in the Qur'ān 21:22], 'Had there been in them both (heaven and earth) other gods besides Allāh, they would surely have been ruined,' is a persuasive argument (*hujja iqnā'yya*), as the implication (*mulāzama*) [between the two ideas in this context] indicates a habitual occurrence (*'ādīya*) that is suitable for rhetorical arguments (*khiṭābiyyāt*). For it is usually the case when there are many persons exercising the office of governor, that there is mutual hindrance of one another and that one gets the upper hand, as is pointed out in the statement of Allāh, 'Some of them would impose their dominance over others' (Qur'ān 23:93). Otherwise, if actual ruin is meant – that is, the passing away from the present visible order [of the heavens and the earth] – then a mere plurality [of gods] does not necessitate that [i.e. the heavens and the earth will crumble], since it is possible that there be an agreement [between those gods] to maintain the present visible order. On the other hand, if the possibility of ruin is meant, there is nothing to indicate the denial of this, since the sacred texts bear witness to the folding up of the heavens and the removal of the present order. So, it is undoubtedly possible.²⁰

There are several points in this passage which deserve more careful consideration. First, al-Taftāzānī's contention that the Qur'anic verse in question is merely expressing a persuasive argument (*hujja iqnā'yya*) seems to be correct. As a logician, al-Taftāzānī must have no interest in a sentence as a string of words or in the mental images or feelings it might call up. Having produced his own works on logic, *kalām*, and rhetoric,²¹ it is not unlikely that al-Taftāzānī embraced the classical Aristotelian distinction of four forms of reasoning corresponding to the four types of audience, namely: (i) the demonstrative (*al-qiyās al-burhānī*), which is meant for the scientific-minded people; (ii) the dialectical (*al-qiyās al-jadalī*), which is specifically used for debating opponents; (iii) the rhetorical (*al-qiyās al-khiṭābī*), which is aimed at persuading or influencing the beliefs, attitudes, or behaviours of targeted individuals; and (iv) the sophistical (*al-qiyās al-mughālātī*), which is purposely employed in order to mislead, deceive, or confuse the audience.²² For him, the Revelation

²⁰ al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya*, 49; Elder, *Commentary*, 38–39.

²¹ al-Taftāzānī wrote, among others, (i) *Tahdhīb al-mantiq wa-l-kalām* on logic; (ii) *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* (commentary of his own *al-Maqāṣid fi 'ilm al-kalām*); and (iii) *al-Sharḥ al-muṭawwal* on rhetoric, which is a lengthy commentary on *Talkhiṣ miṣṭāḥ al-'ulūm* of al-Kātib al-Qazwīnī's (d. 739/1338).

²² Aristotle in his logical corpus (i.e. *Topica*, VIII, 162a, and *the Art of Rhetoric* I, 1356b 4–5) enumerates no less than six types of syllogism or deductive reasoning: (i) *philosophēma* (φιλοσόφημα), which is a demonstrative or apodictic syllogism (συλλογισμός ἀποδεικτικός); (ii) *epicheirema* (ἐπιχείρημα), which is a dialectical syllogism (συλλογισμός διαλεκτικός); (iii) *sophisma* (σόφισμα), which is a disputative or eristic syllogism (συλλογισμός ἐριστικός); and (iv) *aphorema* (ἀπόρημα), which is a dialectical or contentious syllogism leading up to contradiction (συλλογισμός διαλεκτικός ἀντιφάσεως). The other two types of syllogism, namely, (v) *enthymeme* (ἐνθύμημα), which is a rhetorical syllogism (ρητορικὸν συλλογισμόν), and (vi) the 'poetic syllogism' (*al-qiyās al-shi'ri*), which is the kind of reasoning or logical inference commonly used in poetry, were appended by the medieval Arabic philosophers, who regarded Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* as forming integral parts of his *Organon*, following a tradition well-established by the time of

is addressing the masses and therefore is not using a strictly scientific argument to prove its point. As al-Taftāzānī sees it, the cited Qur'anic argument belongs to the persuasive kind of reasoning – a view which is justified both on logical grounds and factual consideration.

From the logical point of view, it is important to note that the major premise used in the Qur'anic argument is a conditional proposition ($p \rightarrow q$ that is: if p then q), rather than a biconditional one ($p \leftrightarrow q$ that is: p if and only if q). This means that the logical relationship between the two statements p and q (denoted by an arrow, ' $\rightarrow$ ') is a unidirectional or one-way implication, whereby if the antecedent (p) is true, then the consequent (q) must also be true, and yet if the antecedent is false ($\sim p$), it does not necessarily follow that the consequent is false ($\sim q$), as the truth value of the consequent is not determined by the conditional proposition. Hence, it would be fallacious to infer the denial of the consequent ($\sim q$) from the denial of the antecedent ($\sim p$) when the premise is a 'one-way' conditional proposition.

Symbolically: $p \rightarrow q$
 In English: 'If p is true, then q is true.'
 For example: 'If it is raining (p), then the ground is wet (q).'
 It is not necessary that if it did not rain ($\sim p$), therefore the ground is not wet ($\sim q$),
 for it is possible that it did not rain ($\sim p$) and yet the ground is wet (q).

In the same vein, it may be argued, following al-Taftāzānī's reasoning, that the logical relationship between the two statements 'there were many gods' (p) and 'the heavens and the earth would be destroyed' (q), which constitute the conditional proposition ($p \rightarrow q$), being used as the major premise in the argument is a one-way implication (*luzūm*), and not a two-directional or mutual one (*talāzum*). This means that it is not necessarily true if there were *not* many gods ($\sim p$), then the universe would *not* be destroyed ($\sim q$), for it is possible that there are *not* many gods ($\sim p$) and the universe is still going to be destroyed (q). To corroborate his view, al-Taftāzānī cites the textual evidence from the Qur'an to the effect that the present order of the universe will be dissolved (q) on Doomsday which by no means implies the plurality of gods (p).

Symbolically: $p \rightarrow q$
 In English: 'If p is true, then q is true.'
 The argument: 'If there were many gods (p), then the universe will be ruined (q).'

However, it is not necessarily true that 'if there were *not* many gods ($\sim p$), the universe will *not* be ruined ($\sim q$)', for it is possible that p is false (i.e. there are *not* many gods ($\sim p$),

Alexandrian, Neoplatonic commentators in late antiquity. For extensive discussion, see Gregor Schoeler, 'Der poetische Syllogismus: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der "logischen" Poetik der Araber', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 133, no. 1 (1983): 43–92; Deborah Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

that is, there is only one god) and yet the universe still be ruined (q) – that is, q is true.

From a factual point of view, al-Taftāzānī argues that even though our empirical observation attests that plurality of authorities often leads to rivalry, clash, and chaos, this is not always the case. That is to say, frequency does not imply necessity. For it is neither always nor necessarily true that whenever two or more authorities exist, there will be conflict. In this respect, one may compare al-Taftāzānī's view to al-Ghazālī's which suggests that our observation does not establish necessary connection, and that what we often take as a necessary connection between cause and effect is actually just a regular pattern of natural events occurring so frequently and repeatedly that we think they are causally related.²³ That is to say, when we observe p followed by q , our minds become accustomed to expecting q whenever p occurs, even though we have no direct evidence of a necessary causal link between p and q . Similarly, just because we sometimes or often see conflict arising when two or more individuals vie for control over the same entity, this does not warrant us to conclude that plurality always and necessarily leads to conflict or that the two are always and necessarily linked in the sense of mutually implying and entailing each other. For this reason, al-Taftāzānī maintains that the seemingly mutual implication or entailment (*mulāzama*) between the two statements (p and q) merely represents a habitual occurrence (*'ādiya*), rather than a perpetual, necessary connection. Consequently, one cannot rule out the possibility of there being many gods (p) without the cosmic system being disturbed ($\sim q$). To use his own words, 'a mere plurality [of gods] does not necessarily entail its destruction' (*fa-mujarrad al-ta'addud lā yastalzimuhu*), as those many gods 'might possibly avoid conflict and agree to keep the cosmos intact' (*li-jawāz al-ittifāq 'alā hādihā al-nizām al-mushāhad*).²⁴

In order to bring home this critical point, some familiarity with Aristotelian logic will be helpful. A disjunctive syllogistic argument is considered demonstrative (*burhānī*) in a strict sense only if its major premise is a biconditional proposition expressing a two-way logical implication (*talāzum*) or equivalence (*tasāwī*) between two statements of which it is made up.²⁵ Also known as *al-iṭtirād wa-l-in'ikās in kalām* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* literature, this logical relationship is usually denoted by a double-headed arrow ($\leftrightarrow$), which signifies that the implication goes both ways: if p is true, then q is true, and vice versa, if q is true then p is true. The truth of p implies the truth of q , and the truth of q implies the truth of

23 Al-Ghazālī's most famous treatment of causality occurs in discussion seventeen of *The Incoherence of the Philosophers: Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, trans. Michael Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), 170. For detailed discussion, see Lenn E. Goodman, 'Did al-Ghazālī Deny Causality?', *Studia Islamica* 47 (1978): 83–120; Ilai Alon, 'Al-Ghazālī on Causality', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 100, no. 4 (1980): 397–405; Benyamim Abrahamov, 'Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Causality', *Studia Islamica* 67 (1988): 75–98.

24 al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya*, 49; Elder, *Commentary*, 38–39.

25 Since a biconditional statement is made up of two conditional statements, we can derive from it two conditional statements, one in each direction, just as it is possible to break down the biconditional statement $p \leftrightarrow q$ into $(p \rightarrow q)$ and $(q \rightarrow p)$.

p . In other words, one statement is true if and only if the other statement is true. If one is true, the other is necessarily also true, and if one is false, the other is also necessarily false. Modern logicians use the phrase 'If and only if' (often abbreviated as 'iff') to express a biconditional relationship between two statements that imply each other since they are logically equivalent, being both true or both false under the same conditions.

Symbolically:

$$p \leftrightarrow q$$

In English:

' p is true if and only if q is true.'

For example: 'A living being is human (p) if and only if it is rational (q)' such that if it is truly rational, then it is truly human, and vice versa, if it is truly human, then it must be truly rational.

Only when the major premise is a biconditional proposition ($p \leftrightarrow q$) expressing a two-way relationship, can all possible conclusions derived from it be true. That is to say, only when the major premise of the argument is a biconditional proposition indicating necessary mutual entailment, can the logical fallacy of denying the antecedent (not- p , therefore not- q) and the fallacy of affirming the consequent (q , therefore p) be avoided. Otherwise, as al-Taftāzānī suggests, the implication is not necessary (*al-mulāzama* [*ghayru*] *qaṭ'īyya*) in the sense that it would be fallacious to say that if there were *not* many gods ($\sim p$), then the universe would *not* be destroyed ($\sim q$), for it is possible that there are *not* many gods ($\sim p$) and the universe will still be ruined (q) as it will happen on Doomsday. Similarly, it would be fallacious to say that if the universe is dissolved (q), then there are many gods (p). Al-Taftāzānī writes:

In no way can it be said that the implication (*mulāzama*) [between the two statements p and q] is so necessary (*qaṭ'īyya*) and that the meaning of their ruination is that they were not created, in the sense that, if two creators were assumed [to coexist], then a mutual hindering of one another in performing acts would be possible, so that one of them would not be a creator nor would anything be created.

For we say that the possibility of there being mutual hindrance of one another implies nothing but the non-plurality of creator (*imkān al-tamānu' lā yastalzimu illā 'adam ta'addud al-ṣānī'*) [i.e. that there be but one creator only] and does not imply the denial of that which is created (*wa-lā yastalzimu intifā' al-maṣnū'*), since the necessary implication can only be denied if actual non-creation is meant, whereas the denial of the consequent can only be negated if by possible non-creation is meant.²⁶

In this passage he is suggesting that the conditional proposition only represents a pos-

²⁶ al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya*, 49–50; Elder, *Commentary*, 39.

sible situation; it does by no means refer to the actual reality. For the fact that there is creation (*maṣnū*) renders the idea of there being a conflict of interest involving two or more gods pointless. Since the universe is already created ($\sim s$), it can be deduced that at least one of the gods did manage to accomplish creation ($\sim r$), and hence the supposed confrontation or mutual hindrance between them becomes irrelevant ($\sim q$). Symbolically, the argument may be analysed as follows:

$p \rightarrow q$	p : there are two/many gods (<i>ṣāni'āni/ta'addud</i>)
$q \rightarrow r$	q : there is conflict (<i>tamānu</i>)
$r \rightarrow s$	r : none of them is able to create (<i>lam yakun aḥaduhumā ṣāni'an</i>)
s :	nothing is created at all (<i>lam yūjad maṣnū</i>)
But $\sim s$	(the universe is already created).
Therefore $\sim r$	(at least one of the gods did manage to create the universe).
Therefore $\sim q$	(the mutual hindrance or conflict is pointless).
Therefore $\sim p$	(the assumption of there being two/more gods is false).

Perhaps by suggesting that the conditional statement does not necessarily guarantee the falsity of the consequent, al-Taftāzānī wants his readers to think critically and consider some counter-examples that will demonstrate the erroneous reasoning – that is, by pointing out actual cases where the antecedent is false ($\sim p$) but the consequent is true (q) or, conversely, when the consequent is true (q) but the antecedent is false ($\sim p$). To sum up, according to him, it is neither true that the plurality of gods necessarily entails the destruction of the world nor is it true that destruction of the world necessarily implies the plurality of gods. In the next passage, al-Taftāzānī addresses a possible objection that might arise from a grammatical point of view. Again, it will be useful to quote him at length:

It may be objected that [in the Qur'ān quotation above] the force of the word 'if' (*law*: *law*) is the negation of the second statement (*intifā' al-thānī*) in the past being due to the negation of the first (*intifā' al-awwal*), so it only indicates the denial of corruption in the past because of the denial of the plurality [of gods].

In answer to this we reply that this is grammatically true, but 'if' (*law*) may be used to establish the negation of the apodosis (*intifā' al-jazā'*) following the negation of the protasis (*intifā' al-shart*) irrespective of time, just as in the statement, 'If the world were eternal from the beginning it would not be subject to change'. The verse quoted above is of this kind. These two usages may seem indistinguishable from

one another to some minds, and hence the confusion.²⁷

In this passage, al-Taftāzānī refutes the opinion that the Arabic particle '*law*' in the sentence indicates something that happened in the past, and that it cannot be used to designate future events. In other words, the conditional statement in the Qur'anic quotation 'If there were many gods in there' is taken to refer to past events and therefore signifies a real conditional (that is, if there was no corruption of the world, it is because there was only one God. If there were many gods, the world must have been corrupted). While he concedes that it may be used to denote what happened in the past, al-Taftāzānī nonetheless insists that such a conditional particle can also be used to indicate the negation of the antecedent ($\sim p$) based on the negation of the consequent ($\sim q$), which is common in counterfactual statements and statements about future events. To recall, counterfactual statements describe a hypothetical situation that is contrary to fact or contrary to what has actually occurred. These are often marked by the "if" of impossibility' (*law al-imtina'īyya*). Taken as a counterfactual statement, the Qur'anic verse which says, 'If there were many gods, then the universe would have been ruined,' expresses a conditional or causal relationship between two events or states of affairs, even though the events described in the antecedent ('there were many gods') did not actually happen. It merely suggests a hypothetical scenario in which the antecedent is false ('there were actually *not* many gods'), whereas the consequent ('the heavens and the earth *would have been* ruined') is imagined or supposed to be true.²⁸ On this account, the Qur'anic statement may be understood as implying something that would have happened if the case were different, although it means to say the contrary – that God is actually one, and the universe has always remained in order owing to the fact that God is one. A relevant explanation of the point is provided by al-Taftāzānī in his work on Arabic rhetoric, *al-Muṭawwal*:

God's saying, 'Had there been in [the heavens and the earth] gods other than Allah, the two would have been disintegrated,' is put forward in order to argue from the impossibility of ruin to the impossibility of plurality of gods, and not vice versa.²⁹ For the negation of plurality of gods does not entail the negation of the ruin [of the

²⁷ al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya*, 50; Elder, *Commentary*, 39.

²⁸ There exist, to my knowledge, at least two treatises dealing with this issue: Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Kāfijī, *al-Ilmā' bi-īfādat law li-l-imtina'* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Qawmiyya, n.d.), MS no. 407 coll. Tafsīr Timūr, fols. 31–48; Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib b. 'Abd al-Majīd al-Fāsi, 'Risāla fi law al-sharṭiyya', ed. Ṣāliḥ b. Fahd al-Ḥantūsh, *Majallat al-Dirāsāt al-Lughawiyya* 2, no. 4 (Shawwāl–Dhū al-Ḥijja 1421/January–March 2001): 101–214.

²⁹ There is a serious typing error in this passage, where the word *intifā'* before the phrase *ta'addud al-āliha* was omitted. Cf. *Majmū'at al-ḥawāshī al-bahīyya 'alā Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Kurdistan al-'Ilmiyya, 1911), 132. I have corrected and supplied the missing word here in translation and in Text 5 of the Appendix.

world], as it is possible that God might ruin it for some other reason. So, the truth is that it is for [the purpose of declaring] the impossibility of the antecedent due to the impossibility of the consequent (*annahā li-ʾimtināʾ al-awwal li-ʾimtināʾ al-thānī*). Some seasoned scholars say that the proof is invalid, although what is claimed is true (*dalīluhu bāṭil, wa-daʿwāhu ḥaqq*). First, according to them, protasis (*shart*) is too broad to signify a cause (*sabab*) – for example, [the sentence] ‘If the sun shines, then the world is bright’. Nor can it denote a condition (*shart*) – for instance, [the sentence] ‘If I have money, I shall go for pilgrimage’, or to designate something else, such as ‘If there is daylight, then the sun shines’. Secondly, protasis is antecedent (*malzūm*), whereas apodosis is consequent (*lāzim*). The negation of the consequent necessarily entails the negation of the antecedent, and not vice versa. It is posited so as to render the apodosis devoid of content (*maʿdūm al-maḍmūn*), thereby disallowing the content of protasis which is the antecedent due to the impossibility of the consequent, which is the apodosis. Therefore, it is meant for denying the antecedent due to the impossibility of the consequent. In other words, it simply means that the negation of result leads to the negation of the condition. Hence, they say about exceptive syllogism: negating the consequent necessarily entails negation of the antecedent, while negating the antecedent does *not* necessarily entail negation of the consequent. For example, [it is correct] for us to say: If this is human, then it must be a living being. Yet this is not a living being, and therefore it is not human. In contrast, [it is incorrect] for us to say: [If this is human, then it must be a living being.] Yet this is not human, therefore it is not a living being.³⁰

In other words, given that if p then q , to argue from the negation of the consequent ($\sim q$) to the negation of the antecedent ($\sim p$) is valid, but the other way round is invalid reasoning (if p then q , but $\sim p$ therefore $\sim q$). Indeed, not every antecedent is a sufficient and necessary cause, for a thing or event may have multiple or more than one cause. For example, a person says, ‘If I have money, I will travel.’ It is possible that he will be travelling without spending a single penny. This remark is reminiscent of the distinction made by modern logicians between ‘necessary’ and ‘sufficient’ conditions. To say that ‘ p is a necessary condition for q ’ means that p must be true in order for q to be true. In other words, if the necessary condition is not met, then the other statement cannot be true. However, satisfying the necessary condition alone does not guarantee the truth of the other statement. It is a requirement that must be fulfilled for the outcome to be possible, but it is not enough on its own to ensure that the outcome occurs. For example, in order to pass a class, a necessary condition might be attending all the required lectures. If a student did not attend all the lectures, it is impossible for them to pass the

30 Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *al-Muṭawwal sharḥ Talkhīṣ miftāḥ al-ʿulūm* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2013), 334.

class. But attending all the lectures does not guarantee that the student will pass; other factors such as assignments and exams also come into play. In contrast, to say that ‘*p* is a sufficient condition for *q*’ means that *p*, if true, guarantees the truth of *q*. In this case, satisfying the sufficient condition alone is enough to ensure the other statement is true. If the sufficient condition is met, the outcome is guaranteed, regardless of any other factors. For example, being a male is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for being a father. If manhood is a sufficient condition for fatherhood, then if someone is a male, he will definitely become a father – which is not necessarily the case. If being a male is a sufficient condition for being a father, then it does not matter whether he has a child or not; as long as he is a male, the apodosis (being a father) is true. It is clear that for al-Taftāzānī neither the plurality of gods nor the corruption of the universe is a sufficient condition for each other to be true or occur – as the case may be.

4. Al-Kirmānī’s Critique

It comes as no surprise that al-Taftāzānī’s statements concerning the nature of the Qur’anic argument for monotheism provoked intense criticism and generated responses for many centuries after his death.³¹ One of the first scholars who took issue with al-Taftāzānī’s views was ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Kirmānī (d. after 842/1439).³² In his polemical treatise *Risālat al-tawḥīd li-radd qawl man qāla ta’addud al-ālihah lā yastalzimu fasād al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ* (A treatise on monotheism with the aim of refuting the opinion of him who says that the plurality of gods does not necessarily entail the corruption of the heavens and the earth),³³ al-Kirmānī categorically rejects al-Taftāzānī’s logical interpretation of the Qur’anic verse about God’s oneness, calling into question his assertion that religious assent and logical assent are two sides of the same coin (*anna al-taṣdīq al-shar’ī wa-l-taṣdīq al-manṭiqī kilāhumā wāḥid*).³⁴

After quoting the controversial passage, al-Kirmānī commences his attack by accusing al-Taftāzānī of having renounced the doctrine of monotheism both rationally and traditionally (*ankara al-tawḥīd ‘aqlan wa-naqlan*). Rationally, he did so, according to al-Kirmānī, by allowing the existence of many gods with the possibility of their coming into agreement – that is, they may coexist without being involved in any conflict. Furthermore, al-Taftāzānī is censured for defying what al-Kirmānī believes to be a long-es-

31 For a listing of opposing camps in this controversy and their respective arguments, see Sa’īd ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Fūda, ed., *Bayān tawḥīd al-Imām al-Taftāzānī dalālat qawlihi ta’ālā law kāna fihimā āliha illā Allāh la-fasadatā ‘alā al-waḥdāniyya wa-dhikr ba’d mā dāra ḥawlahu min munāqashāt bayn al-‘ulamā’* (Amman: Aslein Studies and Publication, 2022), 57–107.

32 For his biography, see al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, 4:340; Taqī al-Dīn al-Tamīmī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-sanīyya* (Riyadh: Dār al-Rifā’ī, 1989), 4:385.

33 ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Kirmānī, *Risālat al-tawḥīd li-radd qawl man qāla ta’addud al-ālihah lā yastalzimu fasād al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*, in *Bayān tawḥīd al-Imām al-Taftāzānī*, 125–35.

34 Ibid., 127–28.

tablished scholarly consensus – that is, by claiming that the Qur'anic statement (Q. 21:22) about monotheism is a rhetorical argument (*hujja iqnā'iyya*) that yields no certain knowledge. And all this was put forth according to his corrupt reason (*'aqlihi al-fāsid*), thereby driving him to allow the plurality and concord of many gods.³⁵ For al-Kirmānī, there is no difference between al-Taftāzānī's view and that of the Mu'tazilī Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 321/933) who claimed that there is no rational justification for believing in one god and that monotheism is based on Revelation, since our reason does not deny the possibility of there being two or more creators of the world. Both al-Taftāzānī and Abū Hāshim shared the same rationalism by renouncing the explicit meaning of sacred texts.³⁶

Al-Kirmānī tells his readers what determined him to write the treatise:

When I was still a student, I used to hear people quote this statement [of al-Taftāzānī] which my mind repelled but could not spell out the objection. Soon I began to see some pseudo-scholars, whenever this issue was raised, became perplexed and unable to adjudicate. Meanwhile, [al-Taftāzānī's] commentary on the creed [of al-Nasafī] was already circulating in the East and the West, with the controversial issue spreading in the countries like poison in the bodies. Having visited two regions and searched in vain for someone who could discuss the matter, I came to think that I might be the only person who realized [al-Taftāzānī's] erroneous claim and therefore saw it my duty to explain its invalidity. God says in the Qur'an, 'Allah commands you to deliver things placed in your trust to those they belong' (Q. 4:85), which I believe pertains to the rights of God as well as the rights of man, and so it is incumbent upon the learned to perform [the task of removing confusion and dispelling error]. Indeed, one should not remain silent on the issue, as 'he who does not speak the truth is a dumb devil' (*al-sākit 'an al-ḥaqq shayṭān akhras*).³⁷

According to al-Kirmānī, belief in one God is unequivocally endorsed by the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition. Therefore, by making such a controversial statement, al-Taftāzānī has not only violated the sacred texts but also defied the scholarly consensus on the matter. Al-Kirmānī marshals a number of Qur'anic verses which he believes explicitly affirm the impossibility of there being gods other than Allah, such as Q. 23:17 which declares, 'Whoever invokes, besides Allah, another god – for which they have no proof – they will surely find their penalty with their Lord. Indeed, the disbelievers will never succeed.' Al-Kirmānī refers to the famous exegete Ḥāfiẓ al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310) who holds that God leaves no room for reason or tradition to posit plurality of gods, so that it is logically impossible to question or doubt His unique existence (*lam yabqa li-'āqil*

35 Ibid., 129.

36 Ibid., 129–30. I could not find the source of al-Kirmānī's reference to Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī's view.

37 Ibid., 130.

shakk wa-lā shubha). Only people with unsound or corrupt reason would entertain polytheism. Al-Kirmānī went so far as calling anyone who subscribes to al-Taftāzānī's opinion or makes a similar statement either an imbecile or infidel (*kafarū jamī'an*).³⁸ In his concluding remark, al-Kirmānī writes, referring to Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī as authority: 'Think about those [Qur'anic] verses. If the argument stated is rhetorical, and the correlation [between the two statements in the Qur'anic verse] is merely expressing habitual occurrence, whereby no disagreement over it is conceivable, then [it would imply as if] God has taught His messenger how to dispute with the idolaters using what is short of a good argument (*bi-mā lā yaṣluḥu dalīlan ḥaqīqatan*).' At this point, it is worth noting that al-Kirmānī's charge of unbelief against al-Taftāzānī has elicited mixed reactions from scholars who are now divided between the detractors and defenders. It was no doubt a serious accusation with serious consequences since the charge of unbelief is a legal pronouncement that involves confiscation of property, capital punishment, and the sentence to eternal punishment in hellfire.

5. Al-Bukhārī's Defence

Among the staunch defenders of al-Taftāzānī in the controversies was his disciple 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Bukhārī (d. 840/1437).³⁹ His apology for his teacher is preserved by Ibn Quṭlūbughā (d. 879/1474) in his glosses (*ḥāshiya*) on *Kitāb al-musāmara* of Kamāl al-Dīn b. Abī Sharīf (d. 906/1500), which is a commentary on *Kitāb al-musayara* of Kamāl al-Dīn b. al-Humām al-Sīwāsī (d. 861/1457). Al-Bukhārī's defence, which might have been titled *al-Ifāda fī al-jawāb 'alā wajh yurshid ilā al-ṣawāb* (The overflowing response in a manner that is leading to the truth), begins by citing al-Ghazālī's famous remarks concerning the use of rational arguments to prove the existence of God, which is said to be comparable to the use of medication (*tajrī majrā al-adwīyya*). Just as physicians should be careful in prescribing medicine for patients according to their varying conditions, one must not use a single approach in communicating with people of various backgrounds and different levels of intelligence. For some weak minds that are stuck in blind imitation and obstinacy because they have imbibed falsehood from their childhood until old age, nothing would work on them except the whip and the sword. But there are a few who can benefit from rational proof, although the enlightenment of the mind is ultimately through the grace of God. The overwhelming majority of people, however, are of lesser intelligence and hence are incapable of understanding rational proofs, just as the eyes of bats cannot see the light of the sun. Such people would be hurt by rational arguments

³⁸ Ibid., 133–35.

³⁹ For his biography, see Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Dalīl al-shāfi 'alā al-manḥal al-ṣāfi* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1998), 2:698 (entry no. 2386); Muḥammad Ḥasan b. 'Aqīl Mūsā, *al-Mukhtār al-maṣūn min a'lām al-qurūn* (Jeddah: Dār al-Andalus al-Khaḍrā', 1995), 555–59.

as a dung beetle is hurt by the smell of roses.⁴⁰

Having said that, al-Bukhārī proceeds to argue that in defending one's faith there is no need to claim decisiveness for what is not decisive (*lā taḥtāj naṣrat al-dīn ilā iddī'ā mā laysa bi-qaṭ'yyin qaṭ'yyan*). As a matter of fact, contrary to what al-Kirmānī wanted us to think, says al-Bukhārī, the Qur'an does contain rhetorical arguments in addition to rational, demonstrative arguments. The former type is meant for less intelligent folk, while the latter type is for those few who are not satisfied with lesser kinds of proofs. As far as the rational proof from mutual exclusion (*burhān al-tamānu*) is concerned, al-Bukhārī proposes a distinction between (i) what he calls 'proof by means of allusion' (*bi-ṭarīq al-ishāra*), which he regards as demonstrative (*burhānī*) and more appealing to the educated class, and (ii) 'proof by means of articulation' (*bi-ṭarīq al-'ibāra*), which is said to be persuasive (*khiṭābī*) in nature and more appropriate for the masses. For him, the consequent 'ruin' (*fasād*) mentioned in the Qur'anic verse may be interpreted both as the resultant failure of two or more gods to create anything, according to the demonstrative method, as well as the concomitant disintegration of the physical universe, according to the persuasive method. One should not confuse the mutual implication based on habitual occurrence (*al-istilzām al-'ādī*) of natural events with the mutual entailment based on strict logical consideration (*al-istilzām al-'aqlī*).⁴¹ In short, al-Taftāzānī's statement allowing the agreement between gods should be taken as a *prima facie* claim based on what seems to be the truth when first seen or thought because, in the final analysis, the truth is that there cannot be more than one God.

6. Al-Ālūsī's Rejoinder

In modern times, the Iraqi exegete Abū al-Thana' Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854) was among the leading scholars of the day who attempted to resolve the points at issue. Once a mufti of Baghdad during the late Ottoman rule, he is best known for his *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī*, a multi-volume commentary on the Qur'an, which he reportedly wrote in order to prove that he had no intellectual link with the British-supported Wahhabi movement.⁴² Al-Ālūsī devoted five densely written pages to interpreting the verse and dealing with the moot point. He begins by criticising those who thought

40 Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn Abi Sharīf, *Kitāb al-musāmara fī sharḥ al-musayara* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, 1929), 54–55. The quoted lines are from Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2015), 14 (the second prologue: *al-tamhīd al-thānī*).

41 Ibn Abi Sharīf, *Kitāb al-musāmara*, 56–58.

42 See Bilal Gökkir and Necmettin Gökkir, 'Sufi or Salafi? Alusi's Struggle for His Reputation against Ottoman Bureaucracy with His *Tafsīr, Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī, Usūl Islam Araştırmaları* 27 (2017): 7–18; Hala Fattah, 'Wahhabi Influences, Salafi Responses: Shaikh Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī and the Iraqi Salafi Movement, 1745–1930', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14, no. 2 (2003): 127–48; Basheer M. Nafi, 'Abu al-Thana' al-Alusi: An Alim, Ottoman Mufti, and Exegete of the Qur'an', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002): 485–86.

that the Arabic conditional particle *law* is used in the Qur'anic quotation for negating the consequent due to the negation of the antecedent (*li-intifā' al-thānī li-intifā' al-awwāl*). There is a problem (*fihi qadh*), says al-Ālūsī, in al-Taftāzānī's statement that the plurality of gods does not necessarily entail 'actual' mutual hindrance (*al-tamānu' bi-l-fi'l*) where each one of them wants something which the other opposes, but rather it merely implies the 'possibility' of such mutual hindrance (*imkān dhālika al-tamānu'*). Since being possible does not necessarily mean actually happening (*al-imkān lā yastalzīm al-wuqū'*), the two gods might agree to cooperate in creating the world, or either one of them might just delegate the work to the other.⁴³ To debunk this, al-Ālūsī refers to al-Khayālī (d. after 862/1458), one of the most authoritative commentators on al-Taftāzānī's work.⁴⁴

Contrary to al-Taftāzānī, al-Khayālī holds that if the Qur'anic verse in question is taken to mean denying the existence of many gods in the sense of occupying, controlling, and governing the universe, then the mutual entailment (*al-mulāzama*) – between two statements in the verse as a biconditional proposition – is necessary (*qaṭ'īyya*), since it would be impossible for those many gods (i) to mutually interfere (*tawārud*) and prevent each other's action, or (ii) collaborate (*ijtimā'*) to perform their action, or (iii) distribute (*tawzi'*) the job among themselves, because all of these would not only imply shortcomings and impotence that are unseemly for a god, but would also entail that nothing has come into existence at all (*in'idām al-kull*), nor has any part of the world (which is not the case, given the fact that the world exists), supposing that one of the gods – being a partial cause (*juz' illa*) – did not perform the act of creation. In addition, it can be argued that the mutual implication is necessary in an absolute sense (*al-mulāzama qaṭ'īyya 'alā al-iṭlāq*). That is to say, if there were many gods, then the world would not be possible (*lam yakun al-'ālam mumkina*), let alone come into existence. Otherwise (i.e. if the world can possibly or does exist), those gods would be involved in mutual hindrance, which is impossible, since the possibility of mutual hindrance is due to the idea of plurality and possibility of a thing. Therefore, al-Khayālī concludes, if plurality is posited, then nothing would be possible at all, including the plurality that is said to entail the impossible.⁴⁵

43 Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī*, 30 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1970), 4:25.

44 Aḥmad b. Mūsā al-Khayālī (d. ca. 875/1470) was a student of 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Khidr Bey, who at that time was the professor of the Sultan Madrasa in Bursa, and through whom he traced his scientific lineage to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, besides Mullā Yegân and Mullā Fanārī. Al-Khayālī's best known work is a gloss or super-commentary on al-Taftāzānī's commentary on al-Nasafī's creed, *Hāshiya 'alā Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafīyya*, which he wrote during his stay as a teacher in Plovdiv and presented to Maḥmūd Pasha. Cf. Aḥmad b. Mūsā al-Khayālī, *Religion ou théologie des Turcs, avec la profession de foi de Mahomet fils de Pir Ali* (Brussels: Chez François Foppens, 1704).

45 al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī*, 4:25.

7. Al-Qāsimī's Appraisal

Another noteworthy assessment of the debate is offered by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1332/1914), one of the leading proponents of Islamic reformism in early twentieth-century Syria and Egypt who advocated a return to the practice of the 'pious ancestors' (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) – hence, the Salafiyya movement – and adopted a scripturalism that emphasised the authority of the textual sources of the Qur'an and the Sunna (Prophetic tradition) for determining orthodox beliefs and practices.⁴⁶ While elucidating the verse in his voluminous *tafsīr*, *Maḥāsīn al-ta'wīl*, al-Qāsimī mentions a similar verse in the Qur'an which declares that 'Allah has never had any offspring, nor is there any god besides Him. Otherwise, each god would have taken away what he created, and they would have tried to dominate one another. Glorified is Allah above what they claim' (Q. 23:91). Citing the Ottoman 'Shaykh al-Islām' Abū al-Su'ūd (d. 982/1574), he asserts that when the consequent is negated, the antecedent is known to be necessarily true. The mutual implication is explained as follows: divinity or being god necessarily means being able to exercise full control of and to manage the universe totally, whether by making changes, replacement, bringing into being and eliminating, giving or taking life. From this it follows that the continuous existence of the universe is either (i) due to the collective action of each one of the gods – which is impossible, because a definite thing cannot happen or come into being through several different causes (*li-istiḥālat wuqū' al-ma'lūl al-mu'ayyan bi-ʿilal muta'addida*) – or (ii) due to the action of one of those gods, leaving the rest outside the scope of divinity. In short, according to al-Qāsimī, the argument is demonstrative enough to rule out the possibility of there being many gods at all.⁴⁷

8. Concluding Remarks

It cannot be denied that controversies help scholars to gain a better understanding of the issues at stake. In the case of al-Taftāzānī's statement, even though complete agreement has not been reached and probably never will be, a re-examination of the moot points should be valuable as an attempt to separate chaff from grain that are often confused. When al-Taftāzānī claimed that the Qur'anic argument for monotheism is rhetorical and persuasive, he was repeating a contention that was already put forward three centuries earlier by al-Ghazālī regarding the need to use different approaches for different groups of people. Referring to Q. 16:25, in which God tells the Prophet, 'Call to your Lord with wisdom (*ḥikma*) and mild exhortation (*maw'iza ḥasana*), and argue with them in the best manner,' al-Ghazālī suggests that we should use logic and rational arguments

46 On his life and Salafism, see Zāfir al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa-ʿaṣruhu* (Damascus: Maktabat Atlas, 1965); Nizār Abāzā, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī: aḥad ʿulamāʾ al-iṣlāḥ al-ḥadīth fī al-Shām* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1997); Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

47 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsīn al-ta'wīl*, 20 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004), 7:183.

when addressing the elite (*al-khawāṣṣ*) who are capable of a high level of understanding, while reserving rhetorical persuasion and dialectical approach for the masses and the opponent in a debate.⁴⁸

In the foregoing pages I have tried to examine closely the contribution of both sides to the controversy, unravelled the complex arguments, and reveal the underlying convictions which spurred each participant's attempt to defend their views and rebut that of their adversaries. It becomes clear that while al-Taftāzānī shared the orthodox Muslim scholars' views on the Islamic doctrine monotheism, he seems to supersede them with the intent to better explain the nature of Qur'anic argument from a logical point of view. With regard to the charge of unbelief, suffice it to recall the Prophet's admonition that accusing a fellow Muslim of unbelief could render the one who levels the charge a non-believer. Finally, if this study amounts to anything, it helps us to see the intellectual dynamics which the issue of philosophical interpretation of sacred texts had triggered among successive generations of Muslim scholars together with the theological and eschatological implications embedded in what was initially a logical question.

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48 See al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-ī'tiqād*, 14–15; Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Ijām al-'awāmm 'an 'ilm al-kalām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2016), 115; Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *al-Qistās al-mustaqīm*, in *Majmū'at rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghazālī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2016), pt. 3, 3–4; Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1957), 1:32–33.

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Mullā Ṣadrā and His Commentators on Ibn Kammūnā's Argument Against Divine Unity

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This paper examines the proofs of divine unity (*tawḥīd*) in the writings of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 428/1037) and their reception in post-Avicennian Islamic philosophy. While Avicenna's demonstration of divine unity became widely accepted among later Muslim thinkers, it was not without its critics. One of the most significant challenges to Avicenna's argument came from the 13th-century Jewish philosopher Ibn Kammūnā (d. 683/1284), who questioned whether the necessity of existence (*wujūb al-wujūd*) logically entails God's uniqueness. His counterargument, which later scholars referred to as the '*shubha* of Ibn Kammūnā,' challenged a fundamental assumption in Avicenna's proof by raising the possibility of multiple Necessary Beings. This critique generated extensive debate among later Islamic philosophers, particularly within the Ṣadrian tradition.

This paper seeks to address the following key question: Does Ibn Kammūnā's critique successfully undermine Avicenna's proof of divine unity, particularly when analysed through the lens of Mullā Ṣadrā's metaphysical system? To answer this, the paper first examines Avicenna's proofs of divine unity, paying particular attention to his reliance on the doctrines of divine simplicity and divine aseity. It then analyses Ibn Kammūnā's objection, explaining the logical structure of his critique and its implications. Finally, the paper explores the responses of Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) and his commentators, demonstrating how their commitment to the primacy and modulation of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd* and *tashkīk al-wujūd*, respectively) provides a more robust framework for defending divine unity against Ibn Kammūnā's critique. By situating Ibn Kammūnā's argument within the broader trajectory of Islamic metaphysics, this study aims to show that his objection does not hold in the Ṣadrian framework.

1. Avicenna's Proof(s) of Divine Unity

Avicenna's attempts to demonstrate the unity of the Necessary Being can be categorised into two distinct yet closely related approaches.¹ In certain arguments, he presupposes

¹ There are surprisingly few studies in the English language devoted to Avicenna's doctrine of divine unity and his ideas about henology in his metaphysics more generally. Two noteworthy examples are Mohammed Saleh Zarepour's *Necessary Existence and Monotheism: An Avicennian Account of the Islamic Conception of Divine Unity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) which contains a brief account of Avicenna's doctrine of divine unity, and Damien Janos' *Oneness, Essence, and Self-Identity: A New Interpretation of Avicenna's Henology* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024) which provides a thorough analysis

the doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS) to show that divine simplicity is incompatible with the assertion that there are multiple divine entities each having the necessity of existence due to themselves. Such an approach typically takes the form of a hypothetical syllogism: If there are two Necessary Beings then they are both necessarily composed in essence. But no Necessary Being is composed in essence (DDS). Therefore, there is only one Necessary Being. What is evident in arguments of this kind is that the simplicity of the Necessary Being is taken as a premise in the argument for divine unity itself.² A proof that every Necessary Being must be a simple being is therefore also counted as a proof of Its uniqueness, and likewise a demonstration to the effect that there is at least one Necessary Being that is simple must also be considered a proof that It is the only possible Necessary Being.³ Avicenna tried to demonstrate this on several occasions.⁴

However, in other arguments, Avicenna leaves out the assumption that every Necessary Being must be a simple entity and instead highlights the significance of divine aseity as the central idea with which to comprehend the nature of the Necessary Being. Such an approach emphasises the principle of sufficient reason above any other consideration. Indeed, as we shall note shortly, DDS is itself a consequence of the doctrine of divine aseity. This doctrine posits that the divine being is a self-sufficient and independent entity that lacks any requirement beyond itself for its existence or its attributes, one of which is its unity. By shifting the focus to divine aseity, Avicenna is making a conscious attempt in my view to demonstrate the external unity (*wāḥidiyya*) of the Necessary Being without assuming DDS (*aḥadiyya*), which it could be argued is a superior method of proving God's uniqueness given that it avoids taking for granted something that is in need of direct proof itself.⁵ Avicenna shows that it is therefore possible to demonstrate the Necessary

of Avicenna's henology. On the conception of divine unity in al-Fārābī, see Olga L. Lizzini, 'L'unité et l'unicité de Dieu: Le double sens de l'être chez al-Fārābī et Avicenne', *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 149, no. 1 (2024): 17–31. See also Aladdin M. Yaqub, 'Al-Ġhazālī's Philosophers on the Divine Unity,' *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 20 (2010): 281–306.

2 As noted by Mayer, composition-based arguments for the uniqueness of the Necessary Being stretch back *via* al-Kindī to Plotinus's *Enneads*. For Plotinus, any kind of composition in the essence of a being—even if such compositions are purely analytical and mental in nature—precludes it being one in the absolute sense. Rather, such beings are 'one-many' and thus require a higher principle for their existence. See Toby Mayer, 'Faḥr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī's Critique of Avicenna's Argument for the Unity of God in the *Iṣārāt*, and Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī's Defence,' in *Before and Avicenna: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group*, ed. David C. Reisman (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 199–218. See also Mohammad Saleh Zarepour, *Necessary Existence and Monotheism*, 3.

3 In this paper I do not consider Avicenna's arguments for the existence of the Necessary Being. Needless to say, scholarship on this aspect of Avicenna's metaphysics is considerably vast.

4 For example, see Avicenna, *al-Ta'liqāt*, ed. Sayyid Ḥusayn Mūsawiyān (Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Pazhūhashi Hikmat u Falsafah-i Īrān, 1401/[2022–2023]), 183–84.

5 It is this feature of Avicenna's proof of divine unity that makes it markedly different from the one offered by his predecessor Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī. On the Farābian proof, see al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State (Kitāb Āra ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila)*, edited and translated by Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 60–61: 'The First Existent is different in its substance from everything else, and it is impossible for anything else to have the existence it has. For between the First and whatever were to have the same existence as the

Being's uniqueness with or without DDS. These approaches are distinct: the first kind of argument relies on the idea that a multitude of Necessary Beings undermines their simplicity, a problem in its own right—whereas the second shows that a multiplicity of divine beings undermines their self-sufficiency. This is quite an audacious move by Avicenna and one that deliberately emphasises the role of modality in his metaphysics, and for this reason represents a significant departure in the proofs offered by earlier *falāsifa* for the Necessary Being's uniqueness because whereas the simplicity of the Necessary Being requires proof, Its self-sufficiency does not. A Necessary Being just is a self-sufficient being. Whilst it can therefore be doubted whether or not the Necessary Being is a simple being, its being necessary is impervious to doubt; Its existing necessarily is precisely what it is; and doubting this would be as illogical as doubting whether a square is a square. Moreover, it is because of divine aseity that divine simplicity itself becomes an inevitable requirement. Because a Necessary Being cannot depend on anything other than itself for Its subsistence, It cannot *ipso facto* have any proper parts which combine to make It necessarily existent.⁶ Therefore, according to Avicenna, divine aseity entails divine simplicity, and it seems that necessity for him—that is, being self-sufficient—is what grounds the metaphysical notion of simplicity and not the other way round.

A key question that arises in connection with these claims is whether or not there is a logical or necessary relation between the internal unity (or simplicity) of the Necessary Being on the one hand and Its external unity (or unicity) on the other. Does committing to the doctrine of divine simplicity also commit one to believing that there is only one divine being? Avicenna believes it does. Ibn Kammūna, a thirteenth-century Jewish philosopher, believed that it doesn't. Why can't there be two Necessary Beings that are both simple and uncaused? To appreciate what is at stake in these arguments, this paper will begin with an analysis and explication of Avicenna's proofs of divine unity before turning to the debates that ensued after him in the writings of his commentators.

First, there could be no difference and no distinction at all. Thus there would not be two things but one essence only, because, if there were a difference between the two, that in which they differed would not be the same as that which they shared, and thus that point of difference between the two would be a part of that which sustains the existence of both, and that which they have in common the other part. Thus each of them would be divisible in thought, and each of the two parts of the First would be a cause for the subsistence of its essence; and it would not be the First but there would be another existent prior to it and a cause for its existence—and that is impossible.' (Translation by Walzer) As for the Qur'anic description of God as *aḥad* referring to the Necessary Being's simplicity in Avicenna's thought, see Daniel De Smet and Meryem Sebtī, 'Avicenna's Philosophical Approach to the Qur'an in the Light of His *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Ikhlās*,' *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 11, no. 2 (2009), 137–38.

6 Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, ed. Muḥammad Taqī Dānīshpāzdhūh (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānīshghāh-i Tīhrān, 1985), 551–53; idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, ed. Muḥtabā al-Zārīfī (Qom: Būstān-i Kitāb, 1423/[2002–2003]), 272.

1.1 Argument(s) from Aseity

An argument from aseity is one that aspires to demonstrate God's uniqueness by resorting to nothing other than God's self-sufficiency. It argues that a belief in the proposition 'God is self-sufficient' warrants the belief that 'God is one' (or, equivalently, 'That there is only one God'). In the context of Avicenna's metaphysics in which modality plays a crucial role, the argument seeks to arrive at the following conclusion: 'If the Necessary Being is self-sufficient, then there is only one Necessary Being.' The argument therefore begins with a claim about divine aseity and attempts to derive a conclusion that asserts divine unity. Avicenna provides a variety of arguments to demonstrate the truth of this conditional statement by considering the implications of denying the consequent. By assuming—for the sake of argument—that there are two or more Necessary Beings, Avicenna shows that there is a logical entailment between the affirmation of divine plurality, on the one hand, and the negation of divine self-sufficiency, on the other. If it can be shown that the existence of more than one Necessary Being undermines each individual Necessary Being's self-sufficiency, then that is a sufficient proof that there cannot be more than one Necessary Being. This is because a Necessary Being that depends on something other than Itself for Its existence (or one of Its perfections) cannot be *necessarily* what It is *due to Itself*. Avicenna utilises arguments of this kind to demonstrate that there cannot be a plurality of Necessary Beings: either there are no Necessary Beings at all or there is just one. Crucially, it is his conception of God as a being that is necessarily existent due to itself that determines this impossibility, since according to Avicenna the notion of being self-sufficient is a concept interwoven in the concept of 'existing necessarily' (*wājib al-wujūd*).⁷ It is here that we can ask the question pertinent to this paper: How does Avicenna demonstrate a violation of the doctrine of divine self-sufficiency in that hypothetical scenario in which there are multiple Necessary Beings? To answer this, let us review some of Avicenna's arguments for divine unity through the principle of divine self-sufficiency.

7 Avicenna usually expresses the concept of divine self-sufficiency with the expression 'necessary of existence in all respects' (*wājib al-wujūd min jamīʿ al-wujūh* or *jamīʿ al-jihāt*). For example, see Avicenna, *al-Shifāʾ, al-Ilahīyyāt*, eds. G. C. Anawati, S. Zayed, M. Musa and S. Dunya (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-ʿĀmma Li-Shuʾn al-Maṭābīʿ al-Amīriyya, 1960), I.6, p. 37; English translation by Michael E. Marmura, *The Metaphysics of the Healing* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 30. A Necessary Being is not just necessary in one or some respects only; It is necessary in all respects (I will refer to this as the principle of absolute necessity). If this were not the case, then there would be at least one respect in which It is not necessary, which implies that there is an aspect or respect within the divine being in which it is contingent. As such, the presence of just a single aspect or respect in which something is contingent, whether this aspect is in relation to its existence or one of its other perfections, is sufficient to make it a contingent being and not a Necessary Being. To be necessary in all respects and perspectives, therefore, means that the Necessary Being is not just necessarily existent (*wājib al-wujūd*), but also necessarily knowing, necessarily powerful, necessarily living etc. If, for example, the Necessary Being's knowledge were not necessary for It, then Its being a knower would be contingent on something other than Its own essence. This renders God's knowledge contingent, and hence God is imperfect. On the proof of the principle of absolute necessity, see Avicenna, *al-Najāt*, 553.

Avicenna begins arguments in this vein by assuming that there are two (or more) Necessary Beings each defined as having the necessity of existence due to themselves (*wujūb al-wujūd bi-l-dhāt*). The qualifier 'due to themselves' ensures that such beings are self-sufficient and independent of any causes whatsoever. If we imagine there are two Necessary Beings, then each of these must have something by virtue of which they are different from the other. In other words, there has to be something that differentiates them from every other existence including other Necessary Beings. Otherwise, there is no difference between them, and their being indiscernible implies that they are identical. Customarily, this is known as the principle of individuation,⁸ and let us therefore call that thing by virtue of which they are different the 'individuation' or 'individuating principle'. In that scenario, then, in which there are two Necessary Beings, each possesses an individuation that is lacking in the other. Depending on whether or not we assume DDS, these individuating factors will be either essential or non-essential properties of each Necessary Being. For example, when considering the hypothetical scenario in which there are two Necessary Beings at *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.7 of the *Shifā'*, Avicenna identifies each Necessary Being's individuation as an accident (sing. *ʿaraḍ* and *lāhiq*).⁹ Although he does not explain in explicit terms why each Necessary Being's individuation cannot be something intrinsic or essential to them, this is presumably because he has already explained in the preceding sections that whatever has the necessity of existence due to itself cannot have a *māhiyya*, a quiddity distinct from its *innīyya*, its individual existence. Hence, given the surrounding context, it is reasonable to assume that whatever distinguishes and individuates each Necessary Being it must be something extraneous to their individual natures as beings that are comprised of existence (*innīyya*) only. In doing so, the argument appears to factor DDS into consideration. But it could be argued that the individual existences of each Necessary Being suffices as a principle of their individuation(s) and hence there is no further need beyond the very existence that each Necessary Being possesses to account for their individuations. Avicenna appears to have this objection in mind when he explains that each Necessary Being's individuation cannot simply be due to the fact that each Necessary Being has necessary existence as this would imply that the individuation in question is a concomitant of necessary existence, which entails that each Necessary Being has the *same* individuation.¹⁰ But if each

8 Everything that exists must have an individuation that particularises its existence. This is a principle of metaphysics in Islamic philosophy referred to by the dictum '*al-shay' mā lam yatashakkhkhaṣ lam yūjad*'. See Ghulām-Ḥusayn Ibrāhīmī Dīnānī, *Qawā'id-i kullī-yi falsafī dar falsafah-i Islāmī* (Tehran: Pazhūhash-ghāh-i 'Ulūm-i Insānī u Muṭāla'āt-i Farhangī, 1389Sh/2011), 1:240–46. For a more general discussion of the problem, see Fedor Benevich, 'Individuation and identity in Islamic philosophy after Avicenna: Bahmanyār and Suhrawardī', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 28, no. 1 (2020): 4–28.

9 Avicenna, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, 1.7, pp. 43–4 (=Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, 35). Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Avicenna are mine.

10 Avicenna, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, 1.7, p. 44. It is crucial to note that there is no real—i.e. ontological—difference between the existence of the Necessary Being and Its necessity. This was a bone of major contention

Necessary Being is the same *vis-à-vis* its essence (viz. the necessity of existence) and the concomitant by virtue of which they are each individuated, then every Necessary Being is just the same in reality as every other and thus indiscernible in actuality. What one Necessary Being has is also possessed by every other Necessary Being. In that case, there would be only one Necessary Being and not many. For this reason, the necessity of existence that two Necessary Beings have becomes a point of their convergence, not a point of divergence, which means that their individual existences alone are not sufficient to differentiate them from each other, and hence the mere fact that they are necessarily existent cannot be regarded as the principle of their individuation. An explanation for why they are different is still required, therefore, and the metaphysics here—assuming that it takes DDS into consideration—requires that the difference between them lies outside of their individual essences, hence the reason why the difference (or individuation) is identified as an accident.

What Avicenna seems to want to emphasise therefore is that the individuations belonging to each Necessary Being cannot be due to their being necessary existents only, but neither can they be a concomitant of this shared meaning since that does not differentiate them either. In other words, that by which two Necessary Beings are the same (i.e. necessary existence) cannot itself be the reason why they are different, and this according to Avicenna appears to be an intuitive claim. Rather, the individuation that accounts for each Necessary Being's specific existence must lie entirely beyond the essence of each

among Avicenna's commentators. In some of his works, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī devoted considerable time and energy to the question of how necessity and existence are related to each other. But he assumes, in these particular works at least, that the two are really distinct. Although the question was never dealt with by Avicenna in the same detail as subsequent thinkers, he nevertheless appears to indicate that by the necessity of existence (*wujūb al-wujūd*) he means not that there is a separate attribute or property that is added to the essence or existence of a Necessary Being but rather just that it has the strongest possible mode of existence. The phrase he uses is *ta'akkud al-wujūd*. This means that whatever has the necessity of existence due to itself has existence necessarily, not that it has necessity in addition to its existence. Therefore, a Necessary Being is one the existence of which is so strong that existence is fixed (*ta'akkud*) for it—both conceptually and in existence. A Necessary Being can never not have existence, therefore, unlike a contingent being whose existence is not fixed for it but could potentially be removed from it. In the *Metaphysics of Kitāb al-Hidāya*, the expression used by Avicenna is *tawkid al-wujūd*. See Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abdu (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira al-Ḥadītha, 1974), 261 (para 157). Note, that Avicenna makes it clear that the necessity of existence and existence are not two things; rather, the former expresses a qualification of the latter as the strongest and most assured form of existence: '*idh wujūb al-wujūd tawkid al-wujūd lā amr ya'riḍ lahu l-wujūd bi-sabab wa-huwa ghayruḥ*'. Cf. Ibn Kammūna, *al-Kāshif (al-Jadīd) fī l-ḥikma*, ed. Ḥamid Nāji Iṣfahānī (Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Pazhūhashī Ḥikmat u Falsafah-i Īrān, 1387Sh/[2008]), 428 (*wa-wujūb al-wujūd lā yaqtaḍi tarakkubuhu min wujūdin wa-wujūbin fa-inna l-wujūb huwa ta'akkud al-wujūd wa-kamāliyyatuhu wa-l-kamāliyya laysat bi-zā'idatin 'alā l-shay' fī l-a'yān*). For our discussion later in this paper it is important to note Ibn Kammūna's association of the notion of necessity (*wujūb*) with perfection (*kamāl*), which he again highlights in his commentary on Suhrawardī's *al-Tawhīdāt*; see Ibn Kammūna, *Sharḥ al-Tabwīḥāt al-lawḥiyya wa-l-'arshiyya*, ed. Najafqulī Ḥabībī (Tehran: Mirās-i Maktūb, 1387Sh/[2008]), 3:175 (*wa-hāhunā laṭīfa wa-hiya annaka idhā qulta <wājib al-wujūd> yanbaghi an lā yufham min <al-wujūd> ma'nān wa-min <al-wujūb> [ma'nān] ākhar fa-yalzam al-tarkīb wa-l-munāqaḍa li-mā qurrira min wujūb 'adam al-takaththur bal wujūbuhu huwa kamāliyyatu wujūdihi wa-huwa basīṭ fa-lā ism lahu*).

Necessary Being and beyond the concomitant properties that ensue from the necessity of existence. But this leads to an infelicitous consequence. If the individuation that each Necessary Being possesses is an accident, then each Necessary Being would be *caused*. Since every Necessary Being in this scenario cannot exist without first being something individuated, it follows by the transitivity of causation that whatever causes the individuation of each Necessary Being also causes each of their individual existences.¹¹ This implies that the existence of each Necessary Being is an effect of something other than itself, and this in turn implies that every Necessary Being is dependent on something other than itself for its existence.¹² However, given that anything that depends on something other than itself for its existence is not self-sufficient, it follows that each of the beings that was initially hypothesised as a Necessary Being is in actual fact just a contingent being. It is clear, then, that both DDS and the doctrine of divine self-sufficiency (a specific instance of the principle of sufficient reason) are factored into Avicenna's reasoning for divine unity. What this argument appears to demonstrate is that the presence of a multitude of Necessary Beings undermines the aseity of each Necessary Being such that none of the entities in question suffices as an independent cause or explanation of its own existence, which is precisely what they must be if they are to be considered Necessary Beings.¹³

Avicenna considers a slightly modified approach for demonstrating the external unity of the Necessary Being from aseity in his discussion immediately following the argument just explained. In this argument (*Ilāhiyyāt* I.7.5–13) he begins by supposing that the necessity of existence belonging individually to each Necessary Being is either a genus or a species. Considered in this way, the necessity of existence is treated as an essential predicate of each Necessary Being. Let us assume, then, that the necessity of existence is a universal predicable of a multitude of Necessary Beings. Now, on the one hand, if 'being necessary' is a genus then its division and distribution among multiple Necessary Beings requires a corresponding number of specific differences, since without this added consideration all of the Necessary Beings in question would be indiscernible. On the other hand, if 'being necessary' is a species then its division among a multitude of Necessary Beings requires accidents of a sufficiently great number to differentiate each instance of that species from other instances of the same. Notice that Avicenna abandons the doctrine of divine simplicity here. The argument he is developing does not

11 By the transitivity of causation I mean the following: if it is true that A causes B and B causes C, then A causes C is also true. In the context of our discussion this means that if something (*w*) causes the individuation (*a*) of a certain Necessary Being, and if that individuation is necessary for the individual existence of that Necessary Being, then it follows by the transitivity of causation that *w* is also a cause that Necessary Being's individual existence.

12 Avicenna rejects the irreflexivity of causation; i.e., nothing can be the cause of its own existence. See Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, IV.17, p. 270.

13 The Qur'an emphasises the sheer independence of God in numerous verses, but it is perhaps most eloquently expressed in the verse 'It is you who stand in need of God—God needs nothing and is worthy of all praise' (Q. 35:15).

assume the internal unity of the Necessary Being but instead begins with the seemingly unproblematic assumption that each Necessary Being is a composite.¹⁴ The reason for this, I argue, is because he wishes to focus on divine aseity as the primary attribute of the Necessary Being in order to show that it is possible to demonstrate the external unity of the Necessary Being without DDS. In other words, he wants to prove the *wāḥidiyya* of God without appealing to His *aḥadiyya*.

Therefore, we have two possibilities. Either the necessity of existence is a genus divided across multiple instances through individual specific differences or it is a species whose instances are individuated by a sufficient number of accidents. However, according to Avicenna, both of these are impossible scenarios. As for the first, he starts by explaining that specific differences do not constitute a part of a genus' definition: 'rational'—for example—is not included in the definition of 'animal'; for it is possible that something is an animal without it necessarily being rational. Therefore, as Avicenna explains, a specific difference 'does not give a genus its essence', but rather 'gives it its subsistence in actuality'.¹⁵ To put this differently, the specific difference confers actual existence (*al-wujūd bi-l-fi'l*) upon the genus and not its reality or essence (*ḥaqīqa*). We need 'rationality' to give existence to the genus 'animal' in extramental reality, namely in the form of a human being, but we do not need it to give 'animal' its essence. This being the case, Avicenna begins his explanation of why the necessity of existence, in particular, cannot be a genus that is dependent on a specific difference for its actual existence. This is because existence cannot be given to that which is characterised as being necessary of existence, for the necessity of existence is nothing but existence of the strongest and most assured kind.¹⁶ As Avicenna explains, 'The reality of the necessity of existence is nothing but the assuredness of existence [...] which is why giving existence to the necessity of existence is [tantamount to] fulfilling a condition of its reality'.¹⁷ This remark requires a pause, for it is not immediately clear what Avicenna means by the clause 'fulfilling a condition of its reality' (*ifādatu shartīn min ḥaqīqatihi*). To understand this, we must connect what

14 If necessity is a genus then each Necessary Being would have necessity as one part of its essence, the other part being their individual specific differences. If it is a species, then every Necessary Being would comprise a genus and specific difference that are different from *wujūb al-wujūd* just as man is different from animal and rational. In both cases the Necessary Beings that possess the necessity of existence are composite entities.

15 Avicenna, *al-Shifāʾ: al-Ilāhiyyāt* I.7, p. 45 (=Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, 36; Marmura modified).

16 To speak of an existence that is stronger and more assured than others implies that existence *per se* is a modulated reality with degrees of intensity. Avicenna does not mention *tashkik al-wujūd* in his discussion of the unity of the Necessary Being, but it is crucial in my view to acknowledge its importance in the background in order to make sense of his discussions of the necessity of existence as *taʾakkud al-wujūd*. Indeed, this is precisely the way, as we shall see, that Mullā Ṣadrā interprets Avicenna.

17 Avicenna, *al-Shifāʾ: al-Ilāhiyyāt* I.7, p. 45 (=Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, 36; Marmura's translation here is problematic). In short, conferring existence upon the necessity of existence is akin to giving something what it already has (*taḥṣīl al-ḥāṣil*).

Avicenna says here with what he has said at the beginning of his discussion at *Ilāhiyyāt* I.7. Recall, that according to Avicenna the function of a specific difference is to give the genus to which it is related its subsistence (or existence) in actuality (*al-qiwām bi-l-fi'l*) but not its subsistence as an essence *qua* essence. If therefore the necessity of existence were a genus in need of a specific difference, then that specific difference would only serve the purpose of giving it a subsistence in actual reality and not making it subsistent in being *what it is*, viz. 'necessary of existence'.

However, there is a problem with this idea when the genus in question is *wujūb al-wujūd* itself. To explain, let us take *wujūb al-wujūd* as a genus and give it a specific difference. When that specific difference qualifies *wujūb al-wujūd* it gives it its actual existence, its *qiwām bi-l-fi'l*, given that this is the function of a specific difference, ontologically speaking. However, by giving it actual existence (*al-wujūd bi-l-fi'l*) the specific difference gives to the necessity of existence the very thing that constitutes its essence, namely, existence itself.¹⁸ For there is no necessity of existence if there is no existence. So, by taking the necessity of existence as a genus that is made subsistent due to a specific difference, the specific difference acts in a manner such that it is now 'fulfilling a condition of its reality', meaning that the specific difference gives to the necessity of existence something that constitutes its reality, which no specific difference can do.¹⁹ Hence, the necessity of existence (*wujūb al-wujūd*) cannot be a genus.

Whereas the argument above provides a sound reason to dismiss the characterisation of necessity as a genus, Avicenna's second justification is more explicit in noting the consequences this would have on the aseity of the Necessary Being if necessity were a genus. The argument is a quite simple one: Since the genus, which in our case is the necessity of existence, does not subsist in actuality until and unless it has been modified by a specific difference, it follows that the specific difference is what makes the necessity of existence an *actual* necessity in extramental reality. In that case, every actual instance of the necessity of existence would not be necessary of existence *due to itself* but instead necessary of existence *due to another*, viz. the specific difference. Necessity would therefore always be necessary by another if the necessity of existence were a genus. There would thus be nothing in that case to instantiate the concept of a

18 One could reply to this by arguing that *al-wujūd bi-l-fi'l* does not constitute the reality or nature of the necessity of existence (*wujūb al-wujūd*). But this hardly makes any sense, however, for that which is necessary of existence has *actual existence* as a necessary property of its very essence. A Necessary Being is precisely just that which exists necessarily in actual reality due to itself. Otherwise, one either demarcates the *wujūd* in *wujūb al-wujūd* as existence in potentiality (*al-wujūd bi-l-quwwa*) or lacking existence altogether. But the first would make whatever has the necessity of existence a contingent being given that whatever has existence in potentiality is *mumkin al-wujūd*. As for the second alternative, it is a plain contradiction: whatever exists necessarily cannot lack existence altogether.

19 As later sections of this paper will focus on the views of Ibn Kammūna, it is worth bearing in mind that Ibn Kammūna considers this to be one of six arguments for the uniqueness of the Necessary Being. See Ibn Kammūna, *al-Kāshif (al-Jadīd fī l-ḥikma)*, 413–14.

being that is necessary of existence due to itself. But we know from Avicenna's *burhān al-siddiqīn* that the set of all existent things cannot be confined to just contingent beings and that a Necessary Being must exist. According to Avicenna, then, if the necessity of existence were a genus, it would not be self-sufficient for its actual subsistence, rendering it merely contingent in reality, which contradicts the very notion of what it means to be 'necessary of existence' which is just that a Necessary Being is self-sufficient. By emphasising the modal qualifiers 'due to itself' and 'due to another', Avicenna shows why the necessity of existence that characterises Necessary Beings cannot be a genus, as this ultimately renders every putative instance of 'Necessary Being' necessary *due to another* and therefore merely contingent in themselves.²⁰

Avicenna's discussion so far has shown that the distribution and division of the term 'necessary of existence' cannot be akin to a genus divided by differentiae nor a genus divided by accidents. The only option that remains is that it is a species, but he discounts this by arguing that the only plausible way for necessity to be individuated as a species among multiple yet discernible instances would be if it were individuated through individuating accidents, but this has already been shown to be problematic.²¹ Each of these arguments seeks to establish the unity of the Necessary Being by first considering necessity as either a genus or a species and then showing that in either scenario any hypothesised Necessary Being would not be a self-sufficient being but would rather depend for its existence on a cause beyond itself for its own actualisation. At no point does Avicenna invoke the doctrine of divine simplicity, but rather hones in on what is to be regarded as the most salient property of necessary existence, namely, the doctrine of divine aseity. This paves the way for a more general argument in Avicenna's thinking that avoids any specific considerations of necessity as either a genus or species. For Avicenna, since the individuation of multiple Necessary Beings through a consideration of the necessity of existence as either a genus or species and their attendant accidental properties undermines each so-called Necessary Being's intrinsic necessity, the only option that preserves the condition of self-sufficiency on the one hand, yet sufficiently accounts for It being individuated on the other, is the option which regards the necessity of existence itself as the individuating principle of the Necessary Being. This eliminates the need

²⁰ Any scenario in which the necessity of existence is actualised by something other than itself contradicts the very notion of what it means to be a necessarily existent thing. Regardless then of whether the necessity of existence is a part-essential predicate or an accidental predicate of each Necessary Being, the conclusion will always be the same: what is necessary of existence by itself is necessary of existence by another, and that is absurd. As Avicenna states, 'The necessity of existence that belongs to each of them individually would be derived from something else, and yet it has been stated that whatever exists necessarily by another does not exist necessarily by itself. Rather it is in and of itself merely contingent. In this case, each and every one of these [Necessary Beings], despite being necessarily existent in itself, would also be possibly existent in and of itself, and that is a contradiction.' Avicenna, *al-Shifā': al-Ilāhiyyāt* I.7, p. 44 (=Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, 35).

²¹ Avicenna, *al-Shifā': al-Ilāhiyyāt* I.7, pp. 45–6 (=Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, 36).

to consider the necessity of existence as either a genus or a species capable of being instantiated in multiple instances, but at the same time requires that whatever has the necessity of existence as an individuating principle is the only instance of a being that is necessarily existent due to itself. When this is the case, the argument cannot begin with the assumption that there are two or more Necessary Beings.

Avicenna presents this generalised form of the argument toward the end of *Ilāhiyyāt* I.7 and in *Ilāhiyyāt* 8.5 of the *Shifā'*, and offers a much-condensed version of the same argument in *Ishārāt* IV.18, which reads as follows:

The individuated Necessary Being, if Its individuation is due to its being necessarily existent then there is no other Necessary Being besides It. But if Its individuation is not due to that but due to something else, then It is caused. This is because if necessary existence is [(a)] an inseparable accident (*lāzim*) of Its individuation, then existence would either be an inseparable accident of an essence other than it [i.e. other than the necessity of existence] or of an attribute, both of which are impossible. And if it were [(b)] a separable accident (*ʿarīḍ*), then that is more deserving of a cause [than if it were an inseparable accident].²²

The argument put forward in this passage is by far Avicenna's most important *textual* source for his argument for the Necessary Being's uniqueness (*tawḥīd wājib al-wujūd*) insofar as its historical reception is concerned. Indeed it is this passage and its argument that became the subject of a much-heated debate in the later traditions of Islamic philosophy and thus requires careful examination before turning to the criticisms that were made of it by later figures such as Ibn Kammūna.

The first thing to note is the significance of the surrounding context in which this remark occurs. Immediately before this passage, Avicenna presents a long discussion through *faṣls* 8–15 in which he establishes the existence of at least one Necessary Being. The existence of *at least one* Necessary Being must therefore be taken for granted, and the question then is whether or not there are any other Necessary Beings. There are then two *faṣls* that each provide one of two crucial premises in *faṣls* 16 and 17, respectively, for the completeness of Avicenna's proof of divine unity, after which comes the passage cited above (*faṣl* 18). The reason why it is important to stress the significance of the surrounding context is so that we can understand exactly what Avicenna means when he begins *faṣl* 18 with the subject-term, 'The individuated Necessary Being' (*wājib al-wujūd al-mutaʿayyan*). In my view, these passages are connected and constitute a single train of thought. Avicenna begins *faṣl* 18 by referring to the very same Necessary Being that his discussion up to this point has established as a real being in extramental reality. His

22 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, IV.18, p. 270. Cf. Ibn Kammūna, *al-Kāshif al-jadīd fī l-ḥikma*, 414.

remarks are therefore directly connected to what has already been said in the previous sections and are a continuation of his discussion of that Necessary Being which has been demonstrated to exist in reality. It is for this reason that the word *mutaʿayyan* enters into Avicenna's thinking and why it is now taken up as a topic for discussion; for whatever exists (and the previous sections have shown that at least one Necessary Being exists) must be individuated (i.e. It must be a *mutaʿayyan*). Unlike the previous discussions in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifāʾ* which were based on hypothetical scenarios in which there are a multitude of Necessary Beings that each instantiate the universal concept or meaning of *wujūb al-wujūd*, the argument presented in *faṣl* 18 of the *Ishārāt* focusses on a non-hypothetical instance of *wujūb al-wujūd*, namely, 'the individuated Necessary Being' the existence of which has been demonstrated in the previous *faṣls*. Avicenna therefore does not begin his argument for divine unity in the *Ishārāt* with hypothetical instances of the necessity of existence, but with the fact that there is at least one Necessary Being—thus implying that there is at least one individuated being that instantiates the necessity of existence due to itself. Assuming then that there is at least one Necessary Being—and given that whatever exists must be individuated (*mā lam yatashakkhkhaṣ lam yūjad*)—it makes sense for Avicenna to ask what it is that has caused this Necessary Being to be individuated. However, before answering this question, Avicenna provides two important premises in *faṣls* 16 and 17 that are needed for his proof of divine unity.

The first of these premises (*faṣl* 16) is the following:

All things differing with respect to their extensions but agreeing with respect to something constituting [their essence] (*muqawwim*) are such that either: [(1)] What they share in common (*mā tattaḥquq fīhi*) is a *lāzim* of what they do not share, such that things that are disparate [in nature] have a single *lāzim*—and this is something that cannot be denied. Or they are such that [(2)] What they do not share is a *lāzim* of what they share in common, such that the things which give rise to a single *lāzim* are themselves disparate and [even] opposed to one another in nature—and this is to be denied. Or they are such that [(3)] What they share in common is an *ʿarīḍ* of what they do not share—and the possibility of this cannot be denied. Or they are such that [(4)] What they do not share in common is an *ʿarīḍ* of what they agree on—and the possibility of this also cannot be denied.²³

This densely packed remark contains some important considerations that are necessary for Avicenna's proof of divine unity. It begins by considering a multitude of things all of which are different from each other extensionally speaking but which have at least one part of their essences in common. Avicenna argues that in situations like this it must be

²³ Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, IV.16, p. 269.

the case that each distinct reality that is similar in some respects but dissimilar in others is a combination of things they have in common and things they do not have in common. For example, two human beings must not only have the meaning 'humanity' in common but also other things they do not share; otherwise, as instances of humanity, they would be indiscernible and would not be two human beings but just one. Given that there is always a combination of something common and something unique, Avicenna focuses on the relationship (*nisba*) between these factors, which he calls 'that by which it is the same' (*mā tattafiqu bihi*) and 'that by which it is different' (*mā takhtalifu bihi*). Since the latter of these is the cause of the individuation (*ta'ayyun*) of every existent reality, it is this particular notion that is philosophically interesting.

Avicenna argues that there are four possible ways for the converging and diverging aspects of a thing's existence to be related: (1) 'What they share in common' is a *lāzim* of 'what they do not share in common'; (2) 'What they do not share in common' is a *lāzim* of 'what they share in common'; (3) 'What they share in common' is an *'arīḍ* of 'what they do not share in common'; and (4) 'What they do not share in common' is an *'arīḍ* of 'what they do share in common'. To make sense of these combinations, we must start by clarifying the difference between two types of accidents known as *lawāzim* (sing. *lāzim*) and *'awāriḍ* (sing. *arīḍ*) on the one hand, and the term *muqawwim* on the other.²⁴ The difference between them is explained by Avicenna himself in his *Manṭiq al-mashriḳīyyūn*:

Every predicate that predicates a thing without complete correspondence is either a *muqawwim*, a *lāzim* or an *'arīḍ*. The *muqawwim* [of a thing] is whatever is in the essence itself of a thing such that its essence is comprised of it and something else. The *lāzim* is whatever must be predicated of a thing after its essence has been actualised in reality. The *'arīḍ* is whatever has been predicated of a thing but it is not necessary for that thing to be predicated with it all the time. What the *muqawwim* and the *lāzim* share in common is that neither of them can be separated from the thing [they predicate]. What the *lāzim* and *'arīḍ* share in common is that each of them is extraneous to the essence of the thing [they predicate] but attaches to it after [it has been completed as an essence].²⁵

Every predicate is either constitutive of its subject's essence or not. If it is constitutive, then it is a *muqawwim*. If it is a non-constitutive predicate, then it is either impossible to separate it from the essence that it predicates or not. If it is the former then it is a

²⁴ The terms *lāzim* and *muqawwim* are both mentioned in *faṣl* 16, whereas the terms *lawāzim* and *'awāriḍ* are both mentioned in *faṣl* 18 which contains the formal proof of divine unity.

²⁵ Avicenna, *Manṭiq al-mashriḳīyyūn*, eds. M. al-Khaṭīb and 'A. al-Qatlā (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1328/1910), 13–14. For a detailed breakdown of Avicenna's theory of constitutive and non-constitutive properties and their types, see Riccardo Strobino, *Avicenna's Theory of Science: Logic, Metaphysics, Epistemology* (California: University of California Press, 2021), 183–192.

lāzim, but otherwise it is an *‘arīḍ*. By identifying constitutive predicates as essential predicates and non-constitutive predicates as non-essential predicates, we can summarise Avicenna’s description of *lawāzīm* and *‘awāriḍ* by defining a *lāzim* as ‘any non-essential but inseparable predicate of a thing’ and an *‘arīḍ* as ‘any non-essential but separable predicate of a thing.’²⁶ A *muqawwim*, by contrast, is an essential part of the essence it predicates and thus forms a part of its definition, its ‘whatness’ or quiddity (*māhiyya*). By distinguishing two kinds of accidents as being either capable of being separated from their subjects or not, Avicenna distinguishes between a ‘strong relation’ of accidentality known as *luzūm* and a ‘weak relation’ of accidentality known as *‘urūḍ*. Whereas the subject (*ma‘rūḍ*) which is predicated by a certain *‘arīḍ* is capable of having or not having that predicate, the subject (*malzūm*) and predicate (*lāzim*) of a *luzūm* relationship can never be separated from each other, even though the predicate in question does not constitute the essence of the subject.

Now, according to *faṣl* 16, Avicenna maintains that the *lawāzīm* of a single essence are always the same. For example, if the essence of humanity produces a certain *lāzim* in one instance then it must produce the same *lāzim* in every instance of that essence. Moreover, he maintains that it is impossible for one essence to have certain *lawāzīm* or concomitant properties in some instances but entirely different *lawāzīm* in other instances of the same meaning—all things being equal. For example, it is impossible that ‘animal’ has the *lāzim* ‘rationality’ in some animals and ‘the absence of rationality’ in others. This is because the *lawāzīm* of an essence are inseparable from it.²⁷ In our example, this would mean that both ‘rationality’ and the ‘absence of rationality’ are inseparable from ‘animal’, itself a contradiction since no animal is both rational and non-rational at the same time in the same way. What this example demonstrates is that if two things have something in common, their *lawāzīm* cannot be different insofar as that common meaning is concerned. The key point therefore is that their *lawāzīm* cannot be the cause of their individuations (*ta‘yyunāt*). This is what Avicenna means when he states that what discernible things do not share in common (*mā takhtalifu bihi*)—namely, the *ta‘ayyun* that causes each thing’s individuation—cannot be a *lāzim* of what they do share in common (*mā tattaḥqu fīhi*)—namely, whatever shared meaning they have in common. In other words, a thing’s individuating properties cannot be shared in any respect whatsoever. Therefore, the individuations that cause things to be different cannot be grounded in

26 Avicenna provides examples for each of these terms in the passage immediately following the one quoted above: ‘An example of a *muqawwim* is “being a shape” for a triangle or “being a body” for a human. An example of a *lāzim* is a triangle being equal to two right angles [...] An example of an *‘arīḍ* is a human being old or young or any of the other states that to occur to human.’ (Ibid., 14)

27 Because such predicates are inseparable from their subjects, they are necessarily true of their subjects. For example, it is necessarily true that four is an even number, even though even number is not part of the essence of four.

the inseparable accidents (*lāzim*) of their shared meaning.²⁸ As a result, option 2 in the list above cannot be true.

As for the possibility that discernible things have a shared *lāzim* in common but are in and of themselves essentially different (option 1), Avicenna does not regard this as being impossible. An example of this is 'animal' and its association (or *nisba*) to 'rational' and 'non-rational' in two distinct beings such as Zayd and this particular dog called Lassie. What Zayd and Lassie have in common is that they are both animals; 'animal' here is the converging factor or that respect in which they are the same (*'mā tattafiqu fihī*'). However, in Zayd's case, 'animality' is inseparable from rationality given that Zayd cannot be a human otherwise, and likewise for Lassie in whom 'animality' is inseparable from her being non-rational. This demonstrates that in the case of two distinct essences such as Zayd (a human) and Lassie (a dog), one of which has rationality and the other non-rationality, the meaning 'animal' is an inseparable accident of the very things by which each is differentiated from the other.²⁹ In Zayd's case, what differentiates him *qua* human from Lassie *qua* dog is his rational faculty, yet the meaning 'animal' is inseparable from 'rationality'. The same is true in Lassie's case. What differentiates her *qua* dog from Zayd is her lacking a rational faculty, albeit that whatever makes inchoate sounds by volition must be an animal. 'Animal' therefore is also an inseparable predicate of Lassie's 'non-rationality'.

Having considered the 'strong' relationship of *luzūm*, we are left with the 'weak' relationship of *'urūd*. However, unlike the case of *luzūm* Avicenna does not consider either of the possibilities (options 3 and 4) connected with *'urūd* as problematic. Two distinct realities may have something in common but can nevertheless be differentiated through different *'awāriḍ*,³⁰ or they may have a certain *'āriḍ* in common and still be individuated through essences that are different.³¹ This means that out of the four possible combina-

28 In the context of our discussion, then, we can formulate the following line of reasoning. If there were two (or more) Necessary Beings, each Necessary Being would share the meaning necessary of existence due to itself with every other Necessary Being. However, in order for each Necessary Being to be an individuated being there has to be a unique individuation for each Necessary Being. Now, if what individuates and differentiates each Necessary Being is a *lāzim* of necessary of existence due to itself, then every instance of necessary of existence due to itself would have that *lāzim*. In this case, the *lāzim* of each Necessary Being is no longer its *ta'ayyun* since every Necessary Being shares the same *lāzim*. Hence, the *lawāzīm* of necessary of existence due to itself cannot be what individuates each Necessary Being.

29 That is, if Zayd is referred to as a 'rational being' and Lassie as a 'non-rational being', then 'animal' is an inseparable accident of both.

30 In this case, the *'awāriḍ* are what cause their individuations. The example given by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) is humanity and whatever its accidents are in two different human beings; for 'this human' and 'that human' are the same in virtue of their humanity, but different individuals insofar as one is a 'this' and the other is a 'that' as a result of their different accidents. See Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Hall mushkilāt al-Ishārāt*, 3:30.

31 The example given by al-Ṭūsī is 'existence', which is a separable accident of 'this substance' and 'this accident'—as in the statements, 'This substance exists' and 'This accident exists' where two distinct essences have the predicate 'exists' in common. See Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, ed. Ḥasanzādah al-ʿAmulī (Qom: Būstān-i Kitāb, 1386Sh/[2007–2008]), 1:570.

tions between the converging and diverging factors of a being that is individuated, only option 1 is impossible. Hence, no being is ever individuated such that its common factor is an inseparable accident (*lāzim*) of its individuation.

The second premise, offered in *faṣl* 17, draws out the aetiological implications of what has been stated in *faṣl* 16. Accidents by their nature require a subject to exist. In some cases, the subject itself is what causes the existence of the accident, and this is what characterises the strong relation of *luzūm*. In other cases, the accidents in question have their existence grounded in a subject but are caused by something other than the subject itself. For example, a particular human being's 'blackness' has the accident 'black' caused by something other than humanity *per se*. In other words, 'black' is grounded in Zayd but is not caused by his humanity *qua* humanity. Accidents like this are what Avicenna refers to as *ʿawārīḍ*. The *lawāzīm*, by contrast, are not only grounded in a subject but are caused by the very essence of that subject, which is the reason why they have a 'strong relationship' of accidentality. Avicenna discusses the aetiological properties of accidents and their relation to their subjects in *faṣl* 17, focusing in particular on the accident 'existence'.

It is sometimes admissible that the quiddity of a thing is a cause of one of its properties [i.e. one of its *lawāzīm*], or that one of its properties is a cause for another property [i.e. one of its first-order *lawāzīm* is a cause of a second-order property]—as in the case, for example, of the specific difference [i.e. a *muqawwim*] being a cause of a proprium [i.e. a *lāzim*]. However, it is not admissible for existence to be a property belonging to a thing and for that property to be caused by that thing's quiddity when its quiddity is not existence, or, for that matter, for it to be caused by another property. The reason for that is because the cause is always prior in existence [to the effect]; and there is nothing prior in existence before existence.³²

Avicenna identifies two kinds of properties (accidents) in this remark. Some properties, he says, are caused by the very essence (or a part thereof) of the subjects they predicate. For example, as Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī explains in his commentary on the *Ishārāt*, the essence of twoness is what gives rise to and causes the meaning of evenness.³³ In this case, evenness is a *lāzim* of twoness. As for a part of a thing's essence being the cause of some of its accidental properties, the example that Ṭūsī provides is that of the specific difference 'rational' causing the proprium 'astonishment', which in turn causes the property 'laughther', all of which are grounded in the specific difference which forms a part of the very essence of humanity. However, as Ṭūsī explains, the difference between existence and all other properties is that 'all of the other properties only exist by virtue

³² Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, IV.17, p. 270.

³³ al-Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, 1:570.

of the quiddity, whereas the quiddity [itself] exists [only] by virtue of existence.³⁴ This means that existence has an ontological priority over everything else, implying that essence cannot precede existence. Existence cannot be the effect of something other than existence, namely, quiddity, and the existence of one thing can only be caused by the *existence* of something else. A quiddity such as humanity that does not have existence as part of its essence, therefore, cannot be the cause of existence, whether this be its own existence or the existence of something else, as this would imply that something other than existence is the cause of existence.³⁵

The two premises which Avicenna discusses and which he will use to formulate his argument for divine unity can therefore be summarised as follows. In *faṣl* 16, he explains that whenever two things share some meaning in common there must also be something which they do not share in order for them to be two discernible entities. The relationship between these elements is either one of 'strong concomitance' (*luzūm*) or 'weak accidentally' (*ʿurūd*).³⁶ However, as accidents, both must be due to a cause.³⁷ Then in *faṣl* 17, Avicenna explains that *wujūd* cannot be a *lāzim* of *māhiyya*. Since the entire discussion appears in the context of an investigation into the Necessary Being, the conclusion that ought to be drawn from all of this is that divine existence (*wujūd*) is either a *muqawwim* of the Necessary Being or an *ʿarīḍ*, but never a *lāzim* of Its quiddity.³⁸ The argument for divine unity is then fleshed out as follows:

- (1) There is at least one Necessary Being.³⁹
- (2) Every existent is something individuated.⁴⁰
- (3) Therefore, this Necessary Being is an individuated existent.
- (4) The cause of this Necessary Being's individuation is either (4a) due to Its being

34 al-Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, 1:570–71 (*wa-l-farq bayn al-wujūd wa-sāʿir al-ṣifāt hāhunā anna sāʿir al-ṣifāt innamā yūjad bi-sabab al-māhiyya wa-l-māhiyya tūjad bi-sabab al-wujūd*).

35 This itself being an instance of the general philosophical principle that 'whatever lacks something, cannot give it to something else' (*fāqid al-shayʿ lā yuʿṭihi*).

36 I borrow these translations from Mayer, 'Faḥr Ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī's Critique of Avicenna's Argument for the Unity of God in the *Iṣārāt*, and Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī's Defence', 202.

37 In Islamic philosophy, the principle that all non-essential predicates of a thing are caused is stated in the Arabic expression '*kullu ʿaraḍī maʿlūl*'. The word '*ʿaraḍī*' here (as opposed to '*ʿaradī*') denotes any non-essential—and therefore accidental—predicate of a thing and encompasses both separable (*ʿawāriḍ*) and non-separable (*lawāzim*) accidents of an essence.

38 This is not because the Necessary Being has no quiddity besides existence itself, but because of the fact that no quiddity *qua* itself precedes existence in being and cannot therefore be the cause of its own existence. It is important for this to be highlighted because Avicenna has not yet proven the simplicity of the Necessary Being, the argument for which is fleshed in the course of *faṣls* 20–22. In other words, this particular version of Avicenna's proof of divine unity does not rely on the premise that the Necessary Being is a simple being, even though, as Avicenna duly demonstrates, no Necessary Being can be a composite reality.

39 This is the conclusion of the argument Avicenna provides for the existence of a Necessary Being in *faṣls* 8–15.

40 Based on the principle '*al-shayʿ mā lam yatashakkhkhaṣ lam yūjad*'.

necessarily existent or (4b) because of something else.

- (5) If (4a), then nothing else can have this meaning.⁴¹ (Hence, there is only one Necessary Being. QED.)
- (6) However, if (4b), then this Necessary Being needs something else to individuate It.
- (7) In that case, the relationship between Its shared meaning ('necessarily existent') and Its individuation is such that either: (7a) Its being necessarily existent is a *lāzim* of Its quiddity; or (7b) Its being necessarily existent is an '*ʿarīḍ* of Its quiddity; or (7c) Its individuation is an '*ʿarīḍ* of Its being necessarily existent; or (7d) Its individuation is a *lāzim* of Its being necessarily existent.
- (8) However, 7a–d all imply that the Necessary Being is caused (*kullū ʿaraḍī maʿlūl*).
- (9) The Necessary Being cannot be caused.
- (10) Therefore, the Necessary Being cannot be individuated in any of the ways mentioned in 7a–d.
- (11) Therefore, this Necessary Being's individuation is due to Its being necessarily existent.⁴²
- (12) Therefore, there is only *one* Necessary Being—*this* individuated Necessary Being (QED).

This remarkable argument for the unity of the Necessary Being (*tawḥīd wājib al-wujūd*) relies on nothing else apart from the notion of existence and its being necessarily existent. It emphasises the definition of what it means to exist necessarily by underscoring the importance of such a being's independence and self-sufficiency, and in doing so gives special importance to divine aseity. For this reason, the argument turns on statement 9: the aseity of a being that exists necessarily means just that the Necessary Being has within itself the ground and sufficient reason for its own existence. In other words, the Necessary Being cannot be caused by anything other than itself. But all of the possible ways of It being individuated by something other than itself mentioned in 7a–d imply that It is caused.⁴³ The argument thus demonstrates that this individuated Necessary

41 This is because being 'necessarily existent' is the individuation of this Necessary Being; and the individuations of each and every individuated being cannot be shared with other beings given that this would otherwise imply that 'what they share in common' (*mā tattaʿfiqū fīhi*) is identical to 'what they do not share in common' (*mā taftariqu bihi*).

42 According to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī this means that the particular existence (*al-wujūd al-khāṣṣ*) that belongs to the Necessary Being is sufficient for Its own individuation. This is important as it deflects the historical misunderstanding of some of Avicenna's commentators that necessity is extensionally different to the existence of the Necessary Being.

43 For the sake of comprehensiveness, it may be useful to explain exactly why each of the possibilities in 7a–d are impossible. The suggestion in 7a is that the essence (*māhīyya*) of the Necessary Being is the cause of Its individuation, and that 'being necessarily existent' is an inseparable accident of that essence. This means that the divine essence is the ontological cause of the Necessary Being's 'necessary existence'; the essence of the Necessary Being is the *malzūm lahu* and Its 'necessary existence' is the *lāzim*. However, Avicenna rejects this suggestion in *faṣl* 17 where he explains that no essence can be the

Being is individuated by nothing else apart from the sheer fact that it exists necessarily, and because of this there can be only one Necessary Being. It seems, therefore, that according to Avicenna, divine aseity is what grounds a proof of divine unity. Any being that exists necessarily is individuated by its necessary existence to be the only being of its kind. This is because the property of existing necessarily must itself be the individuating principle of a Necessary Being and thus cannot be shared with any other being. Hence, there are no beings other than this being that has this property, and thus there is only one being that has the property of existing necessarily due to Itself.

2. The *Shubha* of Ibn Kammūna

Although the historicity of the so-called 'doubt' (*shubha*) of Ibn Kammūna is not the main focus of this study, it is worth stressing that Ibn Kammūna was not the first thinker to criticise Avicenna's proof of divine unity. The Ash'arī theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī had already questioned the possibility of the predicate 'necessary of existence due to itself' being predicable of more than one Necessary Being in his *Kitāb al-Muḥaṣṣal*.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding such criticisms, however, it was the 'doubt' raised by Ibn Kammūna

cause of Its own existence since nothing precedes existence in being. Hence 7a is false. The suggestion in 7b is that 'being necessarily existent' is a separable accident of the Necessary Being's essence. In this case, the divine essence is the *ma'rūd lahu* and 'being necessarily existent' is the '*ārid*'. However, this is impossible because not only does every '*ārid*' require a cause separate from the essence it predicates, but also because the essence itself (which is not necessary of existence due to itself) needs a cause for its existence. Hence 7b is also false. The suggestion in 7c is that the Necessary Being's individuation is a separable accident of Its 'being necessarily existent'. In this case, 'being necessarily existent' is the *ma'rūd lahu* and the individuation of the Necessary Being is the '*ārid*'. However, this too is clearly impossible because it makes the Necessary Being's existence dependent on the very same cause that causes Its individuation to occur to It. In other words, since every '*ārid*' is ontologically dependent on a separate cause different to the essence it predicates, and since that separate cause is what causes the Necessary Being's individuation, it follows by transitivity of causation that this separate cause also causes the existence of the Necessary Being. Hence 7c is also false. Finally, the suggestion in 7d is that the individuation of the Necessary Being is an inseparable accident of Its 'being necessarily existent'. This means that the individuation is the *lāzim* and 'being necessarily existent' is the *malzūm lahu*. But this too is false since in order for 'necessary existence' to be a cause of that individuation (as would be necessary in the case of every *lāzim*) it would first need to exist; for nothing is a cause of anything unless it is first an actual existent. But in order for it to exist it must be individuated, which therefore implies that it is both individuated and not individuated before causing its own individuation, and that is clearly absurd. Therefore, all of the options are false. For a detailed explication of these categories and their ensuing impossibility, see al-Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, 1:580–84. Notice that in all of these arguments there is only one Necessary Being being considered alongside the various metaphysical configurations between Its essence, existence and individuation.

44 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Muḥaṣṣal: wa-huwa Muḥaṣṣal afkār al-mutaqaddimīn wa-l-muta'akhhirīn min al-ḥukamā' wa-l-mutakallimīn*, ed. Ḥusayn Atā'ī (Qom: Intishārāt al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, 1999), 182–83. Rāzī's suggestion is based on an equivocal understanding of the term 'necessary existence'. It is worth bearing in mind that Ibn Kammūna was familiar with the *Muḥaṣṣal* of Rāzī and Ṭūsī's rebuttal of it. See Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke, *A Jewish Philosopher of Baghdad: 'Izz al-Dawla Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1248) and His Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 79–83.

that gained widespread notoriety and scholarly engagement in the eastern lands of Islam from the late fifteenth century. The Shiraz-based philosopher Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 908/1502) seems to have played an important role in this regard, for not only did he draw attention to Ibn Kammūna's criticisms but reinforced them even further in his commentary on Suhrawardī's *Hayākil al-nūr* titled *Shawākil al-hūr fī sharḥ Hayākil al-nūr*.⁴⁵ The subsequent reception of Dawānī's writings in the early Safavid period popularised the so-called '*shubhat al-tawḥīd*' (as it was later known) among a host of thinkers, many of whom wrote independent treatises responding to the *shubha*.⁴⁶

Ibn Kammūna discusses proofs for the uniqueness of the Necessary Being across a range of texts, but his criticisms of Avicenna's proof in the *Ishārāt* are first mentioned in a relatively short work titled *al-Maṭālib al-muhimma min 'ilm al-ḥikma*, which he completed in Sha'bān 657/July–August 1259.⁴⁷ In the section concerning God's uniqueness, Ibn Kammūna begins by first outlining the general Avicennian argument for the Necessary Being's oneness. Though he paraphrases Avicenna's argument with slightly different philosophical terminology, the argument remains Avicennian at its core. The discussion centres on the claim that the species 'existing necessarily' (*wājib al-wujūd*) must be confined to a single individual (*shakḥ wāḥid*). To demonstrate this, Ibn Kammūna imagines a scenario in which there are two Necessary Beings sharing the same essence but with different ipseities, which is necessary if they are to exist as two distinct realities. This leads to a disjunctive proposition: either the ipseity (*huwīyya*) of each Necessary Being is identical to its essence, which in this case happens to be 'existing necessarily', or it is something additional (and therefore different) to it. Since the *huwīyya* of each Necessary Being is what makes it an individual it is obvious that Ibn Kammūna has the principle of individuation in mind and that it is the same in meaning as Avicenna's notion of *ta'ayyun*.

Now, if the individuation (*huwīyya*) of each Necessary Being is identical to its essence, then the conclusion would lead to the desired outcome that there can be only one individual that instantiates the species (or essence) 'existing necessarily'. However, if the individuation of each Necessary Being is additional to its essence then this implies that each Necessary Being's individuation is an accidental property, which Ibn Kammūna argues results in two impossibilities. Of these, the first impossibility is the one that is most pertinent: every accident requires a cause, and the cause of each Necessary Being's individuation in this case would either be the divine essence itself or something else

45 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī, *Shawāwil al-hūr fī sharḥ Hayākil al-nūr*, ed. Muḥammad Rajab 'Alī Ḥasan (Amman: Dār al-Fatḥ Li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2023), 292–317.

46 See Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke, *A Jewish Philosopher of Baghdad: 'Izz al-Dawla Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1248) and His Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 49–51. The list of scholars mentioned include 'Alī b. Faḍl Allāh al-Jilānī (Gilānī) al-Fūmānī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ni'mat Allāh al-Jilānī ('Mullā Shamsā Gilānī', d. 1064/1654), 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Lāhijī (d. 1072/1661), Aqā Ḥusayn b. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Khwānsārī (d. 1098/1687), and Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Sarāb Tunikābūnī (d. 1124/1712).

47 Ibn Kammūna, 'al-Maṭālib al-muhimma min 'ilm al-ḥikma,' *Khiraḍnāmah-i Ṣadrā* 8, no. 32 (2003): 64–86. For more on this work, see Pourjavady and Schmidtke, *A Jewish Philosopher of Baghdad*, 92–3.

entirely. If the divine essence itself causes the accident, then the accident is a *lāzim* (Ibn Kammūna does not use this term) and as such cannot serve as an individuating principle of two Necessary Beings having the same essence, as shown by Avicenna. If, however, the accident is caused by something else entirely, then this leads to the absurd conclusion that the Necessary Being is dependent on something other than itself for its existence.⁴⁸

Ibn Kammūna's reasoning here captures Avicenna's own individuation-based argument for divine unity albeit for one crucial difference. According to Ibn Kammūna, the argument does not go as far Avicenna intended because although it demonstrates that there cannot be two Necessary Beings having *the same essence*, it does not take into consideration how the situation might change *if they had different essences*. Indeed, the argument began with the assumption that there are two Necessary Beings having the species/essence 'existing necessarily' in common and from there proceeded to show why this is impossible. However, according to Ibn Kammūna, this does not prove *tawḥīd* absolutely, since it does not rule out the possibility of there being two (or more) Necessary Beings that share nothing in common insofar as their essences are concerned. As he writes after presenting Avicenna's argument,

[F]rom this it becomes clear that the existence of two Necessary Beings sharing the *same* essence is impossible, but this demonstration does not yield the conclusion that it is impossible for two Necessary Beings to exist absolutely; for it is conceivable—rationally speaking—that there are two beings in existence whose species are confined to a single individual and which share the necessity of existence, since, as you are aware, necessity is something non-existential. If this is something impossible, then its impossibility must be proven by a demonstration other than this one, but I have yet to come across it other than through the methods that are mixed [with a consideration of] how the efficient cause [causes the existence] of the world.⁴⁹

As Pourjavady and Schmidtke observe, this passage was included by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī in his *Shawākil al-ḥūr* and explicitly attributed to Ibn Kammūna.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Dawānī explains that his predecessor considered the plurality of Necessary Beings to be categorically impossible in his *al-Kāshif*, suggesting that Ibn Kammūna had found a solution to his own doubt after all.⁵¹ Indeed a significant portion of the *Kāshif* seems to address the very problem that had been raised by Ibn Kammūna in his earlier work *al-Maṭālib al-muḥimma*. Ibn Kammūna here writes that regardless of whether two Necessary Beings belong to the same species *or not* a plurality of Necessary Beings is impossible.

48 Ibn Kammūna, 'al-Maṭālib al-muḥimma', 77.

49 Ibn Kammūna, 'al-Maṭālib al-muḥimma', 78; cf. Ibn Kammūna, *Sharḥ al-Taḥwīḥāt*, 3:177.

50 See al-Dawānī, *Shawākil al-ḥūr*, 166.

51 al-Dawānī, *Shawākil al-ḥūr*, 166.

If they have the same essence, then Avicenna's proof of divine unity suffices. If they have different essences, then the necessity of existence would be neither identical to each of their essences (since this entails they have the same essence) nor a constituent part of their essences either (since this entails their being composite).⁵² Therefore, two Necessary Beings, each one being the sole instance of its own unique species, would be such that they share the necessity of existence not as a single species or essence but as a concomitant property (*'araḍī lāzim*) of two distinct essences.⁵³ This means that the necessity they have in common is something that lies outside of their essences, and that their essences, being entirely different from each other, serve as the principle by which they are individuated as unique Necessary Beings. This is precisely what later scholars referred to as 'the *shubha* of Ibn Kammūna' even though Ibn Kammūna himself rejects it in his work *al-Kāshif al-jadīd*.

If the existence of two Necessary Beings each belonging to a different species were possible, then the property 'necessity of existence' would have been an inseparable accident for both Necessary Beings, each having the necessity of existence in common but being entirely distinct from it nevertheless by virtue of its essence. In this case, the essence (*ma'rūḍ*) that is predicated with the necessity of existence would not be necessarily existent in itself, but not in the sense that it is incapable of existing necessarily but rather in the sense that it is possible for the intellect to consider that essence by itself without considering that existence [which is predicated of it as an accidental concomitant]. Hence, the essence of the subject being predicated [i.e. the essence of each Necessary Being] cannot be the cause [of this accident], for nothing is a cause unless it exists extramentally. Otherwise, this entails that its existence precedes its own existence [and that is impossible]. Furthermore, the accident [that two Necessary Beings share, i.e. 'necessity of existence'] is not in itself necessary because it does not exist outside of the mind without first being specified [for each Necessary Being] so as to remove its community [i.e. its being a universal]. Therefore, if it is not itself necessary, it has to be contingent, which means that it requires a cause beyond that which it predicates. As a result, each Necessary Being requires a cause beyond itself for its existence, thus leading to the conclusion that each Necessary Being is not something that exists necessarily, and that is absurd.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibn Kammūna, *al-Kāshif (al-jadīd fī l-ḥikma)*, 416.

⁵³ Ibn Kammūna is here following Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī in characterising the necessity of each Necessary Being as a concomitant accidental (*'araḍī lāzim*).

⁵⁴ Ibn Kammūna, *al-Kāshif (al-jadīd fī l-ḥikma)*, 417. For a useful study of Ibn Kammūna's arguments for God's uniqueness, see Ahmed Alwishah, 'Suhrawardī and Ibn Kammūna on the Impossibility of Having Two Necessary Existents,' in *Illuminationist Texts and Textual Studies: Studies in Memory of Hossein Ziai*, eds. Ali Gheissari, John Walbridge and Ahmed Alwishah (Leiden: Brill, 2018): 115–134.

While he appears to have resolved any personal doubts about the proofs concerned with demonstrating the Necessary Being's uniqueness, Ibn Kammūna's 'doubt' took on a life of its own in the centuries after his death. Later scholars took the original argument seriously, and from the early Safavid period onwards the problem of proving the Necessary Being's uniqueness gained increasing notoreity. The problem persisted in the works of numerous scholars who not only grappled with its implications but who, over time, reinforced it, signaling that it could not simply be ignored. By refining and modifying Ibn Kammūna's original *shubha*, later scholars underscored that his doubt was not as easily dismissed as he himself had suggested in the *Kāshif*. Though transformed and refined, the doubt endured. Ironically, it was Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī who, for dialectical reasons, refuted Ibn Kammūna's own attempt to disprove his earlier doubts—ultimately, what later became known as the 'shubha of Ibn Kammūna' was, in reality, Dawānī's rebuttal.⁵⁵

By the late sixteenth century, the so-called *shubha* of Ibn Kammūna had developed into one of the key *problemata* within the Shiraz and Isfahan schools of philosophy. In some scholars minds it demonstrated the rational plausibility of there being more than one Necessary Being without this leading to any of the undesirable consequences outlined by Avicenna in his individuation-based argument for divine unity.⁵⁶ To appreciate why this was so, we need to remind ourselves of some of the key steps in Avicenna's reasoning. The first and most important of these is that Avicenna basis his argument on the principle of individuation and the various ways that something can be individuated. For Avicenna, if there are two or more Necessary Beings then the principle of their individuation is either something that comprises the very essence of each Necessary Being or something accidental. The first implies compositionality, the second that whatever exists necessarily is necessary of existence due to another and not due to itself, both of which entail that each Necessary Being is caused. Hence, there is only one Necessary Being.

Ibn Kammūna accepts that these are two ways in which things may be individuated, but crucially he does not accept that these are the only ways. This is because, according to Ibn Kammūna, Avicenna ignores the possibility that two Necessary Beings are individuated by their very essences as a whole and not due to constituent parts. This being the case, argues Ibn Kammūna, it is conceivable that there are two Necessary Beings that have no parts whatsoever (thereby preserving DDS) but which nonetheless possess essences that are wholly distinct from each other, this being the sufficient cause of their individuations. They are, as eloquently expressed in the original Arabic, *mutabāyina bi-tamām al-dhāt*—entirely distinct from each other and not merely partially so.⁵⁷ Ibn

⁵⁵ See al-Dawānī, *Shawākil al-ḥūr*, 293–94.

⁵⁶ For example, the Safavid philosopher Āqā Ḥusayn Khwānsārī, *al-Ḥāshiya 'alā l-Shifā' (al-Ilāhiyyāt)*, ed. Ḥamid Nāji Isfahānī (Qom: Dabirkhānah-i Kangarah Āqā Ḥusayn Khwānsārī, 1378Sh/[1999–2000]), 296–97.

⁵⁷ As many later thinkers have noted, the ten Aristotelian categories (*maqūlāt*) are essences that are entirely distinct from one another *bi-tamām al-dhāt*—that is, they are distinct *per se* and in their entirety,

Kammūna therefore avoids the first of Avicenna's anticipated problems, namely, the problem of composition in the Necessary Being.

The second reason why the *shubha* could not be so easily dismissed was because it brought into sharper focus the ontological status of necessity itself. If each of the two hypothesised Necessary Beings is a simple reality with no internal relations among parts and entirely distinct in nature from every other essence, then the necessity that characterises them cannot be identical to their essences, as this either requires the need for another essential part (but this is barred since each Necessary Being is assumed to be a simple reality) or the existence of an accidental property that individuates each Necessary Being (but this is also barred since each Necessary Being is *ex hypothesi* individuated by its very essence). Ibn Kammūna argues that it is still justified to apply the term 'necessarily existent' for each Necessary Being by stating that even though the expression does not refer to an actual property outside the mind it is nonetheless an accurate description of each Necessary Being upon consideration. In other words, he considers the notion of a thing being necessarily existent to be *i'tibārī* and does not think it is necessary for all meanings to have a one-to-one correspondence with things in extramental reality.⁵⁸ Such notions are conjured in the mind upon the intellect's consideration of them but do not as such pick out actual properties within things themselves. It is crucial to note that considerations of this kind are not mere fictions conjured out of nowhere. Rather, the object upon which the intellectual act of consideration is performed is something which itself possesses actual existence in extramental reality. Whatever intellectual operations are performed on it are therefore operations grounded in the objective reality of that very thing itself.⁵⁹ The language of Islamic philosophers is highly significant in this regard: *i'tibārī*-terms like 'possibility' and 'necessity' are thought of as being 'extrapolated' or 'extracted' from something else, implying that their existence—albeit of a purely mental character—is derived from something more primitive than the *i'tibārī* concepts themselves. Those things from which the mind extracts *i'tibārī* concepts are referred to as the ground, or, more literally, 'the source from which *i'tibārī* concepts are extrapolated' (*mabda' al-intizā'*), the language of which intimates that *i'tibārī* concepts

rather than due to any shared constituent. If they were differentiated by only a part of their essence, they would necessarily share a common element, which would, in turn, imply the existence of a higher genus encompassing them. This would contradict their status as the highest genera of being, as they would then be subsumed under a more fundamental category.

58 For example, the proposition 'The chair is contingent' does not entail that the predicate 'contingent' has an existence of its own apart from the existence of the chair. In other words, the terms within the proposition 'The chair is contingent' pick out one item of existence—namely, the chair's existence. The word 'contingent' is therefore *i'tibārī* in the sense that when the intellect considers the quiddity of the subject-term 'chair' in relation to its extramental existence it contrives the notion of it being a contingent being. This is in contrast to a more direct realist conception of language in which each of the proposition's terms picks out a separate item of existence.

59 This of course assumes that the intellect is not sullied or influenced by the non-intellectual powers of the soul.

are not mere subjective notions but ideas grounded in the objective reality of things themselves.⁶⁰ For our purposes, it suffices that for Ibn Kammūna the characterisation of each divine ipseity as being something that is necessarily existent due to itself is an *i'tibārī* characterisation of their extramental essences which in themselves are unknown (*majhūl al-kunh*).⁶¹ The name 'Necessary Being' does not pick out a corresponding attribute or property called *wujūb al-wujūd* in extramental existence, but nonetheless is a valid way of speaking and referring to those simple divine ipseities. The implications of this are far-reaching and have significant metaphysical consequences, particularly insofar as they help Ibn Kammūna avoid some of the pitfalls identified by Avicenna in his arguments against divine multiplicity.

Firstly, like Avicenna, Ibn Kammūna preserves the ontological requirement that all existent things must be individuated by maintaining that what causes each Necessary Being's individuation is none other than their unique essences, a consideration ignored by Avicenna. However, this means that the necessity of each Necessary Being is not to be regarded *pace* Avicenna as the essence of each Necessary Being nor a part thereof. Rather, according to Ibn Kammūna, each Necessary Being's necessity is an *i'tibārī* (as opposed to *ḥaqīqī*) concept extracted by the mind's contemplation of those extramental ipseities. This in turn has two important consequences. The first is that each Necessary Being shares a non-essential property known as its necessity, which is important because we would not otherwise be able to speak of more than one Necessary Being. This necessity is *i'tibārī*, meaning that it is an accident of those ipseities *in the mind* as opposed to a real accident of theirs in extramental existence.

This leads to the second outcome which is that the standard philosophical view which asserts that all accidental properties are caused (*kullu 'araḍī ma'lūl*) is now restricted in scope to exclude properties that are *i'tibārī*. Later philosophers in the Shī'ī tradition such as Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī (d. 1289/1873) and al-'Allāma al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1402/1981) explain the basis for this exclusion by first distinguishing between two kinds of predicates known as *al-maḥmūl bi-l-ḍamīma* and *al-khārij al-maḥmūl* (also known as *al-maḥmūl min ṣamīmihi*).⁶² For the sake of simplicity, we can loosely translate these as 'predicates added to their subjects' and 'predicates extracted from their subjects', respectively. Let us

60 For more on the history and importance of *i'tibārī* concepts, see Jari Kaukua, 'I'tibārī Concepts in Suhrawardī: The Case of Substance', *Oriens* 48 (2020): 40–66.

61 The epistemic point about their essences being unknown was added and highlighted by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī.

62 See al-'Allāma al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Nihāyat al-ḥikma*, ed. 'Abbās 'Alī Zurā'ī Sabzawārī (Qom: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī al-Ṭabī'a Li-Jamā'at al-Mudarrisīn), 2130–131; cf. Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, *Sharḥ al-Manzūma fī l-mantiq wa-l-ḥikma*, ed. Muḥsin Bidārfar (Qom: Manshūrāt-i Bidār, 1432/[2010–2011]), 1:39; idem., *Sharḥ al-asmā' aw Sharḥ Du'ā al-Jawshan al-kabīr*, ed. Najafqulī Ḥabībī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishghāh-i Tihārān, 1385Sh/[2006–2007]), 373–74. The distinction is alluded to by Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣābiḥī and Ja'far Shāh-Nāzārī (Tehran: Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmī-yi Ṣadrā, 1381Sh/[2002–2003]), 117, 20.

consider the propositions 'The body is blue' and 'The body is contingent' to explain the difference between them. In the first proposition, the predicate-term 'blue' is something that is added to the referent of the subject-term in extramental reality; thinking of the subject-term on its own (i.e. body *qua* body) will not give the mind the concept of blueness. 'Blue' is thus an added property or predicate of 'body', without the addition of which the proposition 'The body is blue' would be false. By contrast, if we consider the statement 'The body is contingent', the predicate-term 'contingent' does not refer to a property or quality that is *added* to the referent of the subject-term. Rather, by contemplating the nature of the subject-term the mind itself extrapolates the notion of contingency from it without anything being added to the subject in actual reality. The difference between these predicates can therefore be explained in terms of whether or not the rational faculty can extrapolate the notion of the predicate from the subject itself without recourse to any non-rational processes such as perception or experimentation. For example, in the case of bodies, the rational faculty can itself deduce that whatever is a body must have extension, and whatever has extension must have parts, and whatever has parts must be composed, and whatever is composed must be contingent, and hence the contingency of bodies can be known *a priori*. For Islamic philosophers, this implies that no quality or property has been added to bodies extramentally in order for them to be contingent: one can know that bodies are contingent by simply 'considering' (*i'tibār*) the concept of a body on its own. By contrast one cannot derive the notion of blueness from the mere thought or conceptualisation of body *qua* body. One verifies the statement 'The body is blue' through experience, which implies that something must have been added to a body extramentally in order for it to be blue. Since blueness cannot be deduced from body itself, and given that a predicate like 'blue' is a real as opposed to *i'tibārī* predicate, it must be an accident that requires a cause for its predication. We can therefore conclude that the principle 'All accidental predicates must be caused' (*kullu 'araḍī ma'lūl*) only applies to those predicates that have been added to a subject extramentally but not to *i'tibārī* predicates extracted from their subjects in the mind. The principle '*kullu 'araḍī ma'lūl*' thus applies to accidentals that are *al-maḥmūl bi-l-ḍamīma* but not to those that are *al-khārij al-maḥmūl*.

In the context of Ibn Kammūna's argument against divine unity, then, the implications of this are as follows. Since the notion of each divine ipseity being 'necessarily existent' is *i'tibārī*, the accidental nature of this necessity does not mean that necessity is an accident in the same way that a real predicate like 'blue' is an accident in the extramental world. The reason is that necessity is now taken to be a predicate extrapolated from—as opposed to a predicate added to—the very essence of each divine ipseity. Necessity is an accidental predicate that is *al-khārij al-maḥmūl* and not *al-maḥmūl bi-l-ḍamīma*, and

therefore not subject to the principle that ‘all accidentals are caused’.⁶³ This implies that even though the necessity of each divine ipseity is something accidental, it is not caused in the robust metaphysical sense of efficient causation outside the mind. Ibn Kammūna thus appears to have found a workaround for each of the potential pitfalls of Avicenna’s argument against divine multiplicity by showing that there can be two or more Necessary Beings that have nothing in common other than the mere label ‘being necessarily existent’ which is extrapolated from their simple essences by an act of intellectual appraisal. As such, two or more Necessary Beings could potentially coexist alongside each other without either of them being composed or their individuations being caused. Avicenna’s so-called *burhān* for the unity of the Necessary Being is therefore shown to be inconclusive.

3. Mullā Ṣadrā and His Commentators on the *Shubha* of Ibn Kammūna

In the remaining sections of this paper, I examine the ideas of the 17th-century Safavid philosopher Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 1045 or 1050/1635 or 1640), commonly known as Mullā Ṣadrā, as well as the philosophers who carried forward his school of thought from the Qajar period to the present day. I discuss Ṣadrā’s engagement with the *shubha* of Ibn Kammūna and examine the ways in which he sought to resuscitate Avicenna’s proof of the unity of the Necessary Being. I then explore what I consider to be the ‘missing gap’ in Avicenna’s argument for divine unity, at least from a Ṣadrian perspective—namely, the doctrine of divine perfection (DDP) and its importance as a crucial device in understanding the concept of necessary existence. Finally, I analyse some of Ṣadrā’s own proofs for the unity of the Necessary Being which are grounded in the principles of perfect being theology to highlight the depth and originality of his contributions to Islamic debates surrounding God’s uniqueness.

Mullā Ṣadrā’s responses to Ibn Kammūna’s *shubha* appear across a wide range of texts, each offering a different perspective on the problem.⁶⁴ Some of these responses

63 Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, *Sharḥ al-Manẓūma*, 1:447.

64 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-mutaʿālīyya fī l-asfār al-arbaʿa*, ed. Aḥmad Aḥmadī (Tehran: Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmī-yi Ṣadrā, 1380Sh/[2001]), 6:52–58; cf. idem., *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya fī l-manāḥij al-sulūkīyya*, ed. Sayyid Muṣṭafā Muḥaqqiq Dāmād (Tehran: Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmī-yi Ṣadrā, 1382Sh/[2003]), 50–1; idem., *al-Mabdaʾ wa l-maʿād fī l-ḥikmat al-mutaʿālīyya*, 1:85–91; idem., *Sharḥ u taʿliqah-i Ṣadr al-Mutaʿallihīn bar Ilāhiyyāt-i Shifāʾ*, ed. Najafqulī Ḥabībī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmī-yi Ṣadrā, 1382Sh/[2003]), 1159–180; idem., *Asrār al-āyāt wa-anwār al-bayyināt*, edited by Muḥammad ʿAlī Jāwidān (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmī-yi Ṣadrā, 1389Sh/[2010]), 57–60; idem., *al-Maẓāhir al-ilāhiyya fī l-ʿulūm al-kamālīyya*, ed. Sayyid Muḥammad Khāmanāʾī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmī-yi Ṣadrā, 1391Sh/[2012]), 28–34; idem., *Sharḥ al-Hidāya al-Athirīyya*, ed. Maqṣūd Muḥammadi (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmī-yi Ṣadrā, 1393Sh/[2014]), 2:150–56; idem., *al-Ḥikmat al-ʿarshīyya*, ed. Aṣghar Dādbih, in *Majmūʿah-i rasāʾil-i falsafī*, 4:50–1 (Tehran: Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmī-yi Ṣadrā, 1391Sh/[2012]); idem., *al-Masāʾil al-qudsīyya*, ed. Manūchahr Ṣadūqī Sahā, in *Majmūʿah-i rasāʾil-i falsafī* (Tehran: Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmī-yi Ṣadrā, 1391Sh/[2012]), 4: 246–48; idem., *al-Mashāʾir*, ed. Maqṣūd Muḥammadi, in *Majmūʿah-i rasāʾil-i falsafī* (Tehran: Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmī-yi Ṣadrā, 1391Sh/[2012]), 4:385–6.

are rooted in Ṣadrā's own metaphysical commitments, while others draw from more conventional Avicennian foundations. The *Asfār* addresses the problem using the former approach, which explains why Ṣadrā is quick to identify the primary reason why thinkers in the post-Avicennian tradition struggled to provide an adequate refutation of Ibn Kammūna's counterargument. He begins his response by asserting that the problem is particularly acute because of the fact that many of Avicenna's later followers characterise existence (*wujūd*) as a kind of empty concept devoid of extramental reference. As Ṣadrā explains,

This doubt presents itself with great difficulty for those later scholars who say that existence is a term that lacks reference [in extramental reality] and is just a mental consideration. This is because, in their view, the only thing that existent things [*qua* existent things] share in common is this generic extrapolated notion. This shared existence does not, in their view, have a real instantiation, neither in God the Necessary Being nor in anything contingent. Their use of the expression 'individual existence' for the Necessary Being is just technical jargon since by using this phrase they refer to something unknown.⁶⁵

Ṣadrā begins his engagement with Ibn Kammūna's argument against *tawḥīd* by admitting that it presents a significant and genuine problem for those holding the view that existence is *i'tibārī*. But the problem doesn't stop just there. Indeed, according to Ṣadrā, assigning an *i'tibārī* status to existence (and as a corollary to necessity) not only impacts philosophical arguments that aspire to prove the unity of the Necessary Being but also their ability to demonstrate that such a being even exists. This is explained in Ṣadrā's *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād* in which the discussion focusses on the very notion of what it means to be necessarily existent (*wājib al-wujūd*). The idea that there is something 'necessarily existent' can be interpreted in one of two ways: (1) that there is something that *has* the necessity of existence, but which in and of itself is something else, or (2) that something *is* the necessity of existence *per se*.⁶⁶ An analogy helps clarify what is meant here. 'Being white', for example, can either be a property of something which in itself is not white (such as a piece of cloth), or it can be a semantic description or label of the colour white itself. In other words, according to Ṣadrā, the ascription 'necessarily existent' can either be used as a description of the very essence of that which it names or as a description of something whose essence is something other than 'necessary existence' but which nevertheless has the necessity of existence, the latter of these being the

65 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'aliyya*, 6:54.

66 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād*, 1:83. In other words, there are two kinds of necessary being: (1) necessary due to itself (*al-wājib bi-l-dhāt*) and (2) necessary due to another (*al-wājib bi-l-ghayr*). A necessary being in the former sense *is* the necessity of existence, while a being in the latter sense *has* the necessity of existence. Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ al-Ḥidāya*, 2:152.

view of Ibn Kammūna.⁶⁷ From a metaphysical point of view, then, the expression 'being necessarily existent' used for beings of the former kind does not require any cause or qualification just as the predicate 'white' used for the colour white itself does not need anything beyond the subject itself, being as it were a kind of tautology.⁶⁸ However, its application to beings of the second kind does, implying that the validity of the predicate 'necessarily existent' for such beings is grounded in the fact that some property has been added to or extrapolated from them.⁶⁹ For this reason, Ṣadrā explains that

Any necessary existent that is not identical to necessary existence itself, but is something that possesses a reality or essence [other than necessary existence] and that this essence is what is then attributed with being necessarily existent, such a thing requires for its being attributed with necessary existence the accidental occurrence of this meaning (*amr*) and therefore a *cause* to make it be this way or to make it *per se*, so that it then may be attributed with this property, depending on which of the two opinions one takes on this issue.⁷⁰ Regardless, the thing itself is merely contingent, and it is only on account of that property that it becomes something necessarily existent. Whatever is like this cannot be necessarily existent due to itself.

67 Recall that according to Ibn Kammūna, the essence of each Necessary Being is unknown (*majhūl al-kunh*). Hence, each so-called 'Necessary Being' has an essence to which the necessity of existence is ascribed, but which in itself is not the necessity of existence. As for what that 'Necessary Being' might be in itself, this is unknown.

68 In such cases, if *a*'s F-ness is because of *a* itself, then F is an essential property of *a*. Therefore, the statement '*a* is F' is essentially true. Hence, if N is a necessary being and its necessary existence is due to it being N, then N is a necessary being due to itself. But if N's necessary existence is not due to N itself, then N's necessary existence is due to something else. In this case, N is not necessary existence *per se*, but rather has the necessity of existence.

69 There exists, in other words, a *ḥaythiyya ta'liliyya* —an intermediary causal explanation—for the notion of 'necessary existence' which makes it a predicate of beings in the second category, but no such *ḥaythiyya* for beings in the first category. To explain what is meant here consider a proposition of the kind 'S is P'. If P is true of S *insofar as S is S and only S*, then there is no further cause or justification needed for the predication of P for S. An example would be 'X is a human, and X is rational', for the rationality of human beings is true by definition and not because of something else besides being a human. By contrast, when S *qua* S is not sufficient for it having the predicate P, then there must be some cause or justification for the predication of the predicate term of the subject term. The statement, 'X is a human being, and X is a philosopher' can only be true if there is a cause or good reason for X's being a philosopher, for the mere fact that X is a human being does not suffice for X to be a philosopher. In this case, there has to be a *ḥaythiyya ta'liliyya*, 'an aspect of causation', that justifies X's being a philosopher. In the context of our discussion, the predicate 'necessarily existent' in 'X is necessarily existent' can be interpreted in two ways, either as a predicate of X that requires a *ḥaythiyya ta'liliyya* or not. In the former case, X cannot be necessarily existent due to itself, for its being necessarily existent is *due to a cause*. In the latter case, X's being necessarily existent has no cause, and the reason why this is so is because X is 'the necessity of existence' *per se* in the same manner, loosely speaking, that white *per se* is white.

70 The controversy that Mullā Ṣadrā is referring to is the problem of instauration (*jaʿl*) which asks whether it is the existence of things or their quiddities that is made when things are caused to be. For Ṣadrā, the existence of things is what is instaurated *per se* (*majʿūl bi-l-dhāt*) by the efficient cause, not their quiddities. The efficient cause of a human being in other words does not make a human a human, but rather it makes it an existent human.

Hence, every necessarily existent thing due to itself is necessarily existent in itself.⁷¹

However, both existence and its necessity are *i'tibārī* according to Ibn Kammūna and other so-called 'Illuminationist' philosophers. The implication from a Ṣadrian perspective is that each so-called 'Necessary Being' is therefore just some unknown essence that *has* the necessity of existence but which in and of itself is neither existence nor necessity. But if the necessity of existence is not itself the essence of the Necessary Being then its being necessarily existent requires a cause, and that entails that what is initially presumed to be a Necessary Being is in fact just a contingent being. Hence, there are no beings that are truly necessary of existence due to themselves if existence and necessity are *i'tibārī*.

For these reasons, Ṣadrā believed that any attempts to refute Ibn Kammūna's counterargument based on similar metaphysical presumptions about the nature of *wujūd* were bound to fail, and it is not surprising that his discussion immediately turns on the assumption that existence is *i'tibārī*.

As for the truth of the matter verified by us, namely, that this extrapolated notion [i.e. existence] has real instances [outside the mind] and that its relation to them is akin to the relation the general accident has to its individuals and species, then the objection is not so strong. Rather, it can be deflected with the least amount of reflection since this notion, notwithstanding the fact that it is something extrapolated from quiddity due to an accidental cause, is nonetheless a meaning extrapolated from a real instance of every individual existence *qua* its essence due to itself. Therefore, its relation to the particular existence possessed by each individual being is the same as the relation that infinitive nouns have to their quiddities—such as the meaning 'humanity' which is extrapolated from each human being or 'animality' extrapolated from every animal. All of these are shared as meanings which are subsequent to the fact that they have something in common [in extramental reality] from which their meanings can be expolated.⁷²

Ṣadrā's emphasis here is that the concept of being (*mafhūm al-wujūd*) is in some sense grounded in the extramental things that instantiate it just as the concepts 'humanity' and 'animality' are grounded in the essence of individual humans and animals. Being has a reality (*ḥaqīqa*) outside the mind and is not just some concept our minds conjure up without anything running parallel to it in extramental reality. One proof of this is that the concept of being cannot be derived from quiddities *qua* quiddities: the idea of a horse, for example, cannot give to the mind the concept of being *per se* since no quiddity has the meaning of *wujūd* included within itself. Rather it is the *existence* of the horse that

71 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād*, 1:85–86; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-Hidāya*, 2:152.

72 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'āliyya*, 6:54.

allows the mind to abstract and formulate a general concept of *wujūd*, but this is only possible if individual existences are real.

Therefore, if Ṣadrā's claim is true and the reason why Ibn Kammūna's *shubha* poses a genuine threat to Avicenna's argument for divine unity is because it assumes that being (*wujūd*) is merely an abstract concept that has no real ontological status in extramental reality, then it is because of this very assumption that subsequent thinkers too have failed to adequately respond to the challenge of Ibn Kammūna's counterargument. For Ṣadrā, there is no adequate way of responding to the *shubha* of Ibn Kammūna without first denying the very premise on which it is built. What this means in effect is that the only way of proving the *tawhīd* of the Necessary Being is by first committing to the doctrine that being itself is something real (*'ayniyyat al-wujūd*) and that this reality is what grounds the perfections of all existent things (i.e. *aṣālat al-wujūd*). Therefore, whatever perfections an existent thing has, it derives these from its *wujūd* and not from its *māhiyya*.

Ṣadrā's proof of divine unity in the *Aṣfār* therefore begins with him first affirming the reality of *wujūd* itself *pace* Illuminationist thinkers like Ibn Kammūna. By doing this he removes the basic premise on which Ibn Kammūna's argument against divine unity is constructed: *wujūd* has a *ḥaqīqa* and is not merely *i'tibārī*. From Ṣadrā's perspective, the *shubha* of Ibn Kammūna is a basic non-starter. It begins with a false premise (i.e. *i'tibārīyyat al-wujūd* and *aṣālat al-māhiyya*) and therefore ends in a false conclusion (i.e. multiplicity of Necessary Beings, *ta'addud wājib al-wujūd*). Avicenna's argument for divine unity thus remains intact and immune from Ibn Kammūna's counterargument on the proviso that one reads into it the Ṣadrian notion of being's ontological primacy (*aṣālat al-wujūd*). This understanding about the nature and existence of *wujūd* is thus incorporated by Ṣadrā as an explicit premise within formal argument of the Necessary Being's unity:

Therefore, if in existence there are two Necessary Beings whose necessity is due to themselves, then [the notion of] existence that is extrapolated from them would be a shared meaning as admitted by the opponent also. But this implies that the real existence that runs parallel to this notion and which happens to be the principle for the extrapolation of [each being's] existence-status is also shared in some respect. Hence, each Necessary Being's distinction from the other must be due to something essential, for whenever the aspect from which two things happen to agree is something essential, then the aspect from which they are different—that is, each being's individuation—must also be something essential. However, the result of this would be that the essence of neither Necessary Being is simple; and being composed—as is known—negates necessity.⁷³

73 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'ālīyya*, 6:55.

The crucial point here is that the both the notion of existence (*mafhūm al-wujūd*) and the notion of necessity (*mafhūm al-wujūb*) are not just some mind-conjured notions that have no ontological footing in being itself. Šadrā's emphasis is that what the mind grasps through notions such as *wujūd* and *wujūb* are not mere fabrications of the mind, but extrapolations of meanings from things that have extramental existence. Running parallel to each person's mental conceptualisation of the meaning of existence—the existence that Šadrā here refers to as 'extrapolated existence' (*al-wujūd al-intizā'ī*)—is a real instantiation of existence itself (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqīqī*). Both 'existence' and 'necessity' are referring terms. Without this real instance of existence there would be no extrapolated notion of existence. In other words, as Šadrā explains, the real instantiations of existence are principles that give rise to the extrapolated notion of existence; they are the '*mabda'* *intizā'ī al-mawjudiyya al-maṣdariyya*', the ontological counterparts of our notion of being as an infinitive noun. The concept of being thus follows from the fact that being itself is an actualised reality, albeit that what is conceived (*mafhūm*) differs from its extramental reality in the same way that a verbal noun or infinitive (*maṣdar*) like 'humanity' differs from the extramental instances of 'human'.⁷⁴ The concept of being as a *maṣdar* is therefore something 'extrapolated from' the external things that instantiate it just as Ibn Kammūna believed, but unlike Ibn Kammūna what it is extrapolated from is none other than the reality of each thing's *wujūd* as opposed to their *māhiyya*, since no quiddity *qua* itself is capable of purveying the notion of existence. It is for this reason that Avicenna's argument for divine unity stands according to Mullā Šadrā.

In that scenario, then, where there are two Necessary Beings, the mind extrapolates a single notion of existence and a single notion of necessity which it then predicates of both entities. This means that *wujūd* and *wujūb* are not equivocal notions, but have a single meaning shared by two Necessary Beings. This implies that each Necessary Being has a real instantiation of *wujūd* running parallel to our understanding of it as a concept, an extramental counterpart which must also be shared in some sense. The analogy here is similar to that of any other infinitive noun: although Zayd and 'Amr have different instances of humanity extramentally (they are extensionally different), they are nonetheless the same essentially (they are intensionally the same). And just as each instance of humanity in Zayd and 'Amr cannot differentiate them from each other, so too in the case of two Necessary Beings that participate in a real instantiation of necessary existence: their existences do not and cannot individuate them as particular beings and hence they cannot be differentiated from each other through existence alone. Given that in Šadrā's

⁷⁴ Šadrā draws on the linguistic relationship between infinitives and their corresponding concrete nouns to illustrate how the concept of *wujūd* ought to be related to its extramental instances. For example, just as Zayd's being a human (*insān*) is due to the fact that he possesses 'humanity' (*insāniyya*), so too is this *mawjūd*'s being a *mawjūd* due to the fact that it possesses *wujūd*. Therefore, in the same way that there would be no 'humans' if 'humanity' did not exist, likewise there would be nothing *mawjūd* if *wujūd* itself did not exist.

metaphysics each Necessary Being is just being in its purest and most intense form, the ‘essence’ of each Necessary Being is just existence itself. Existence is thus essential to each Necessary Being. But if there are two Necessary Beings that each have existence as their essence, then there are only two possibilities: either (1) they are not really two individual beings but in fact just one and the same, or (2) they are really distinct from each other and differentiated by some other part within their essence, which implies that they are not simple beings. However, any kind of mereological distinction within the essence of either Necessary Being implies that it is composed and in fact not necessary of existence due to itself. Therefore, there can be only one Necessary Being—*tawḥīd*.

Ṣadrā’s proof of divine unity undercuts the *shubha* of Ibn Kammūna and substitutes what it considers to be the false premises on which it is built with the correct premises from a Ṣadrīan point of view. Ibn Kammūna assumed that two Necessary Beings could co-exist if they had unique but unknowable essences other than existence. From Ṣadrā’s perspective, this is precisely where the argument fails: it prioritises essence over existence and subsequently demotes *wujūd* to a non-instantiated mind-constructed phenomenon with no actual footing in extramental reality. Ṣadrā’s argument by contrast begins with *wujūd* as the primary ontic reality and from there proceeds to demonstrate that there cannot be two *wujūds* that are both essentially necessary. It is a simple and efficient argument that avoids the initial trappings of the objections raised by Ibn Kammūna.

The above argument has the imprint of Ṣadrā’s own philosophical commitments and is based on the assertion that existence is a concrete, mind-independent reality, which is a claim rejected by so-called Illuminationists. The dispute here focuses on the nature of existence itself and less on the formal structure of Ibn Kammūna’s counterargument. But let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that we do not concede to Ṣadrā’s belief that existence is a single modulated reality (*ḥaqīqa wāḥida mushakkika*) and argue along the lines of the Illuminationists’ philosophy and demarcate existence as a purely mental notion. In that case, Ṣadrā highlights another problematic feature of Ibn Kammūna’s counterargument which does not require a commitment to his own doctrine of *aṣālat al-wujūd*; and that is that while he may disagree with the Illuminationists on whether or not existence has extramental reference, both he and they agree that the notion of being (*mafhūm al-wujūd*) is a *single* concept in the mind.⁷⁵ But a single notion such as existence can only be a shared notion if the things from which it is extrapolated have something in common. However, this is explicitly not the case in the *shubha* of Ibn Kammūna, and the question arises as to how it is possible to extrapolate and predicate a single notion of existence/necessity when each Necessary Being has a unique essence that shares nothing in common with the essence of the other Necessary Beings. How can any singular notion be derived from the many *qua* many?

75 That is, the concept of being is monosemic (*mushtarak ma‘nawī*).

Şadrā expresses this concern in several works. In the *Asfār*, he writes as follows:

Therefore, it is self-evident that a single infinitive meaning cannot be predicated of disparate essences *qua* disparate essences without there being an aspect of unity between them. Hence it follows on the basis of the aforementioned assumption [i.e. the notion of existence being a single notion] that two Necessary Beings must agree in some intrinsic property not lying outside of their essences. However, an agreement in something essential necessitates that differentiation and multiplication are the result of an aspect within the essence also—such as a specific difference when they have a genus in common, or individuating properties when they share the same species. However, the result in each case is composition [within the divine essence] and that negates the essential necessity [of each Necessary Being].⁷⁶

This is a criticism that Illuminationist philosophers must respond to. From Şadrā's perspective, it is simply impossible to derive a single unified notion from the many *qua* many, and thus a further nail in the coffin from his perspective for Ibn Kammūna's hypothetical argument against God's uniqueness.⁷⁷ Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, the chief commentator and propagator of Şadrā's ideas in Qajar Iran, went a step further by arguing that it was not just the Illuminationists but other 'Peripatetics' too who are confronted with the same objection.⁷⁸ The reason, he explains, is that although *mashā'ī* philosophers like Avicenna believe in *wujūd* having real ontological presence outside the mind, they nonetheless deny the claim that existence is a single reality extramentally. The Peripatetics reject the notion of an underlying unity among ontologically subsistent existences. Sabzawārī argues that this position creates a dilemma within the Peripatetic tradition. If all extramental existences are essentially distinct—a claim he attributes to the Peripatetic school given their metaphysical stance that each instance of being (*wujūd*) is 'entirely distinct' (*ḥaqā'iq mutabāyina bi-tamām al-dhāt*) from all others⁷⁹—then it should not be possible to conceive of a single, unified notion of *wujūd*, as the Peripatetics themselves purportedly maintain.⁸⁰ In other words, if each instance of *wujūd* has nothing in common with any other instance outside the mind, then the concept (*mafhūm*) of *wujūd* must be equivocal. This follows from the principle that when two things share nothing in common, there is

76 Mullā Şadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'aliyya*, 6:56; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-Ḥidāya*, 2:153; idem., *Sharḥ u ta'līqah-i Şadr al-Muta'allihīn bar Ilāhiyyāt-i Shifā'*, 1:170.

77 Cf. Mullā Muḥammad Ismā'īl Iṣfahānī 'Wāḥid al-'Ayn' (d. ca. 1242/1826), *Sharḥ al-Ḥikmat al-'arshīya*, ed. Muḥammad Mas'ūd Khudāwardī (Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Pazhūhashī Ḥikmat u Falsafah-i Irān, 1391Sh/[2012–2013]), 440.

78 See Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, *ta'līqa* no. 89 in Mullā Şadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'aliyya*, 6:472–73.

79 See Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, *Sharḥ al-Manzūma*, 1:207–10.

80 See Ḥasan Ḥasanzādah Āmulī, *Waḥdat az dīdghāh-i 'arīfu ḥakīm* (Qom: Alif Lām Mīm, 1383Sh/[2004–2005]), 64–5.

no justification for predicating a single notion of both.⁸¹

If this is indeed the case, then Ibn Kammūna's well-known objection appears to present a genuine problem: two Necessary Beings having nothing in common would each give rise to an equivocal notion of being 'necessarily existent,' which is merely a name they have in common rather than a unified concept. Consequently, if the notion of each Necessary Being's existence is equivocal then there is no *jihat al-ittifāq* (basis for agreement) between them, and thus no need for a *jihat al-iftirāq* (basis for differentiation) beyond their already distinct essences. As a result there would be no logical obstacle preventing the simultaneous existence of multiple Necessary Beings.⁸² The necessity of existence is not, in the strict sense, then, a common accident (*ʿarad ʿamm*), and hence does not require a cause contrary to Avicenna's concerns. So, even within the Peripatetic framework, Sabzawārī contends that the existence of multiple Necessary Beings does not necessarily entail composition or causation. The Peripatetics therefore cannot demonstrate God's uniqueness in the face of Ibn Kammūna's counterargument.

Sabzawārī's provocation sparked outrage among later proponents of Avicenna's philosophy. For thinkers in the Ṣadrian tradition, however, there was widespread support for Sabzawārī's claim that it is impossible to extrapolate or derive a single meaning from diverse things whose realities are entirely distinct or which have no accidental properties or features in common.⁸³ In their view, it is simply not possible to derive a singular meaning from diverse things *qua* diverse things.⁸⁴ A uniform concept can only be derived

81 See Ḥasan Ḥasanzādah Āmulī, *Wahdat az didghāh-i ʿarif u ḥakīm*, 68–72.

82 As Sabzawārī states, there is a single 'label' (*ʿunwān*) called 'Necessary Being' for each so-called Necessary Being, but in reality what is being referred to by that label, i.e. the *muʿanwan*, is entirely different and distinct in each case. This is precisely the reason why in Ibn Kammūna's *shubha* each so-called 'Necessary Being' is referred to as *mahjūl al-kunh*, 'unknown in essence'. Because although they share the label 'necessary of existence due to themselves', this is not their essence; it is merely a label (*ʿunwān*) for things whose essences in actual fact are unknown and dissimilar in every instance. See Sabzawārī, *taʿliq* no. 89 in Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-mutaʿāliyya*, 6:472.

83 See, for example, Muḥammad Riḍā Qumshāʾī's *Risāla fi radd jawāz intizāʿ mafhūm wāḥid min al-ḥaqāʾiq al-mutabāyina*, in Ḥamid Nāji Iṣfahānī (ed.), *Majmūʿah-i āsār-i ḥakīm-i ṣuḥbā: ʿarif ilāhī Āqā Muḥammad Riḍā Qumshāʾī* (Tehran: Qānūn Pazhūhash, 1378Sh/[1999–2000]), 245–52. Abū l-Ḥasan Jilvāh, who was a staunch Avicennian and opposed Ṣadrā's philosophy, tried to rebut Sabzawārī's claims in his *Risāla fi anna mafhūm al-wāḥid kayfa yuntazaʿ min al-ḥaqāʾiq al-mutabāyina*, in Ḥasan Riḍā Zadah (ed.), *Majmūʿah-i āsār-i Ḥakīm Jilvāh* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ḥikmat, 1385Sh/[2006–2007]), 605–8. The question has been discussed extensively in a variety of philosophical contexts by thinkers in the modern era; see, for example, al-ʿAllāma al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Nihāyat al-ḥikma*, ed. ʿAbbās ʿAlī al-Zārīʿī al-Sabzawārī (Qom: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1426/[2005–2006]), 1:33–34.

84 While there is an almost unanimous agreement that things insofar as they are different cannot produce a common notion predicable of them, there is a significant difference of opinion on the converse proposition as to whether or not it is possible to predicate diverse meanings of a reality whose essence is simple and has no composition or multiplicity whatsoever. On this particular aspect of the debate and its relevance to the discussion of God's attributes, see Rūḥullāh Farūghī, 'Arziyābi pāsikh-hā-yi falāsifah u ʿurafā bih ishkal-i nāsāzghārī-yi taʿaddud-i ṣifāt-i khudāvand u wahdat-i dhāt', *Ilāhiyāt u falsafah-i muʿāṣir*, 1, no. 1 (2021): 234–46.

when things have some degree of ‘overlap’.⁸⁵ According to Sabzawārī, the only solution to the problem is to revert to the Ṣadrīan intuition that existence is a single modulated reality that is, by its very essence, the cause of all unity and multiplicity, a unity-in-multiplicity and multiplicity-in-unity. ‘As for the victorious *madhhab*’, boasts Sabzawārī, ‘in which existence is primary (*aṣīl*) and a label (*‘unwān*) for a simple luminous reality that is modulated through an acute sense of modulation (*al-tashkīk al-khāṣṣī*)’,⁸⁶ whose relation to that reality is akin to the relation of the essential to its subject, or a concept (*mafhūm*) to its actual instance [outside of the mind]—and not akin to the relation that an extrapolated concept (*al-mafhūm al-intizā‘ī*) has to its source—then [the objection in Ibn Kammūna’s *shubha*] is easily deflected [...].⁸⁷

There are other potential pitfalls and criticisms, however. All of the arguments presented so far assume that the principle of each Necessary Being’s individuation is distinct from what unites them as Necessary Beings.⁸⁸ But one may question why this is so given that according to Ṣadrā’s own metaphysics, existence is both the principle of unity and difference. This of course invokes an idea inherent to Ṣadrā’s philosophy known as the modulation of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) and is something which Ṣadrā himself believed is necessary to properly grasp the relation between the one and the many. It is thus an objection made from within the Ṣadrīan system itself. A possible criticism here would be that if existence itself is both what unites and distinguishes things, then is it not conceivable for there to be multiple Necessary Beings? One could argue that among them,

85 See Sabzawārī, *Sharḥ al-Manẓūma*, 1:447.

86 The expression ‘acute sense of modulation’ (*al-tashkīk al-khāṣṣī*) refers to the idea that the reality of being is modulated through different degrees of intensification and debilitation. This is a crucial aspect of Mullā Ṣadrā’s metaphysics according to which being (*wujūd*) itself is what unites and differentiates different levels of existence just as the essence of light itself is what differentiates different intensities and hues of light. The implications of this are profound and far-reaching: there is only one true existence, which manifests itself in different orders of hierarchy, some more intense than others, yet not distinct at root from existence itself. As Sabzawārī, *Ta’līqāt ‘alā l-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Ta’rīkh al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 395–96 remarks, existence being modulated in the acute sense (*al-tashkīk al-khāṣṣī*) means that ‘prior and posterior levels of existence are not separated through detachment (*baynūna ‘uzliyya*)’, but rather that each level of existence is just the same as the others at root except that each level has more or less existential perfections than the others. It is crucial to note the language here; the expression ‘*baynūna ‘uzliyya*’ is a direct reference to the words of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the first Shī‘ī Imam, who in some of the sermons attributed to him is reported as saying that ‘declaring God’s unity (*tawḥīd*) is to differentiate Him from his creation, such that His distinction from them is like that of how an attribute is separate [from what is attributed] and not that He is separated from them by detachment’ (*wa-tawḥīduhu tamyizuhu min khalqīhi wa-ḥukm al-tamyiz baynūnati sifatin lā baynūnati ‘izlatin*). See Abū Manẓūr Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Tabrāsī, *al-Ihtijāj*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Bahādūrī and Muḥammad Hādī Bih (Qom: Intishārāt-i Uswa, 1413/[1992]), 1:475; cf. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Sayyid Hāshim al-Ḥusaynī al-Tihirānī (Qom: Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1430/[2009]), 43 where in the course of a long sermon the Imam is reported as saying, ‘He does not inhere in His creation that it may be said “He is among them,” nor is He removed from it that it may be said, “He is separate [from His creation]”’.

87 Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, *ta’līqa* no. 89 in Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta‘āliyya*, 6:473; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-Manẓūma*, 1:446–47 fn. 3.

88 That is, they assume that the ‘*mā bihi al-iftirāq*’ is different from the ‘*mā bihi l-ishtirāk*’.

one possesses a more intense and perfect degree of existence, distinguishing it from others whose existences are comparatively weaker and less perfect. This does not raise concerns about existence being composite, since variations in intensity do not add to or subtract from existence itself. Nevertheless, a distinction remains between what is more intense and what is less intense in relation to existence. Thus, even within Ṣadrā's own metaphysical framework, the possibility of multiple Necessary Beings seems justifiable.

Ṣadrā's response and subsequent discussion of this problem brings into sharper focus some of the most salient aspects of his metaphysics. His responses shed important light on how he understood the nature of existence and its necessity as being intricately woven with the idea of perfection; how that which exists necessarily due to itself must be understood and equated with a being that is not only perfect but maximally perfect.⁸⁹ The idea of perfection thus becomes a crucial link in Ṣadrā's metaphysics. It ties together concepts such as existence, necessity and unity, and as such serves to fill a missing gap in Avicenna's arguments for God's uniqueness by giving greater prominence to an idea that seems to have less emphasis and importance in Avicenna's own metaphysics. Ṣadrā responds to the objection as follows:

This [objection] is deflected based on what we have alluded to previously: that any kind of deficiency [in a thing] entails [that thing] being caused. This is because it is not possible for the nature of existence *qua* existence to have any deficiency without a cause, since the meaning of 'being deficient' is not the same as the meaning of 'existence'. Deficiency is a privation, and nothing can necessitate its own privation. This is not the case with perfection, since a thing's perfection is its assuredness for it.⁹⁰

What this passage highlights is that inasmuch as existence is just existence it is absolute perfection. For this reason, the nature of existence cannot have any deficiency, because any kind of deficiency would be tantamount to a privation (*ʿadam*). But there is by definition no *ʿadam* in being *qua* being. Therefore, if an existence is deficient, then this cannot be due to an intrinsic privation since *ʿadam* is not an inherent property of *wujūd* but rather its opposite. Any limitation or curtailment of being must therefore result from an external factor imposing a restriction from without on the nature of *wujūd* itself.⁹¹

89 On perfect being theology, see the excellent study by Yujin Nagasawa, *Maximal God: A New Defence of Perfect Being Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

90 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-mutaʿālīyya*, 6:55.

91 Ṣadrā provides a useful analogy here. Imagine two lines, one of which is longer than the other. Whilst it is true that the perfection of the longer line lies in the fact that it is a line, it is not correct to say that the imperfection of the shorter line is due to its being a line only. In other words, it is not because of the nature it possesses as a line that it is deficient. Its deficiency comes from the fact that its length has been curtailed and limited, but this does not come from liness *qua* liness. According to Ṣadrā, this means that if there is an infinite line, then there is nothing present other than liness itself, whereas

This means that a 'Necessary Being' that is less than perfect (or less perfect than another) cannot be sheer existence, but a less than infinite existence that is limited by a privation caused by something other than existence itself. It would thus be a combination of being and non-being and hence a contingent being.⁹² In Ṣadrā's metaphysics, pure being—existence entirely free from any association with non-being⁹³—is inseparably linked to ultimate perfection. Every maximally perfect being is pure existence, and every pure existence is maximally perfect. The Necessary Being is therefore existence in its most intensified form (*mutaʿakkid al-wujūd*), a being that Ṣadrā himself describes as 'that greater than which nothing more perfect can be conceived' (*wa-lā yutaṣawwar mā huwa atamm minhu*).⁹⁴ In contrast, a contingent being is any entity that is not maximally perfect and therefore not pure existence, but is rather a being whose essence is tinged with non-being.⁹⁵ Its contingency arises from its inherent deficiency, and because it is contingent it must necessarily be caused. The highest intensity of existence corresponds to infinite existence, therefore, and consequently whatever is necessarily existent by itself must be entirely devoid of imperfections since it is the deprivation of being (i.e. the lack of existential perfections) that renders entities finite.⁹⁶ Therefore, if a so-called 'Necessary Being' were in any way less than absolutely perfect, it would be contingent and thus subject to causation—rendering it finite. The conclusion, then, is that there can be only one ultimately perfect being, and thus only one true Necessary Being.⁹⁷ Ṣadrā summarises these points as follows:

Therefore, every existence of finite intensity must have a cause other than its own individual existence that limits [its intensity], and it is that cause that specifies and individuates a particular rank [for it] within the nature of existence. However, being-caused negates the necessity of existence; i.e. it negates a thing being exist-

in the case of a finite line there is not only liness itself but something else besides liness, namely a limit or terminus that constrains the line from being only a line—that is, an infinite line. See Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-mutaʿālīyya*, 6:55.

92 In the Ṣadrian framework, possessing a quiddity is tantamount to an ontological privation, metaphysically speaking; for quiddity itself is defined as the 'limitation of being' (*ḥadd al-wujūd*), and any limit is a privation of sorts (*amr ʿadamī*). Therefore, every contingent being the essence of which is not identical to its existence (*wujūd*) possesses *wujūd* in a limited sense, and thus comprises both *wujūd* and its limitation which is a privation (*ʿadam*). For Ṣadrā, the combination of *wujūd* and *ʿadam* is itself a kind of composition (*tarkīb*), therefore, and in the Ṣadrian tradition is depicted as 'the most detestable form of compositionality' (*sharr al-tarākīb*). See Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, *ḥāshīya* no. 146 in Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-mutaʿālīyya*, 1:565.

93 Whatever has no association with non-being must therefore be a Necessary Being.

94 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-mutaʿālīyya*, 6:26.

95 All contingent beings possess a quiddity. No quiddity is existence. Hence, the essence of every contingent being is characterised by non-*wujūd*.

96 For this reason, the Necessary Being cannot have a *māhiyya* because a *māhiyya* is something other than *wujūd* (e.g. 'human' is other than 'existence'), and whatever is other than *wujūd* is by definition non-*wujūd*, i.e. non-being (*ʿadam*).

97 See Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, *Sharḥ al-asmāʾ*, 374.

ent by eternal necessity. Therefore, it is impossible for there to be more than one Necessary Being. This explanation of *tawḥīd* in the manner presented here is not found in proofs of other scholars (*ahl al-ʿtibār*).⁹⁸

One of the most profound metaphysical implications of this is that if God is maximally perfect and infinite in His existence then there is by definition no ontological scope for any other form of (necessary) existence. All of reality must therefore be occupied by the reality of the Necessary Being. If this were not the case, there would exist something not encompassed by the reality of the Necessary Being, implying that the existence of the Necessary Being is distinct from the existence of that other entity. However, this is inadmissible in Ṣadrā's system as it necessitates a limitation on the existence of the Necessary Being. As previously established, any limitation renders existence finite, caused, and contingent in essence. Such attributes are incompatible with that which possesses necessity of existence in and of itself. Consequently, the only coherent conclusion is that 'the Simple Reality is all things' (*basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa kullu l-ashyāʾ*).⁹⁹ For these reasons, there is both a logical and metaphysical impossibility in the idea of there being two or more Necessary Beings.

4. Mullā Ṣadrā on Necessity, Unity and Perfection

The notion of perfection plays a pivotal role in Ṣadrā's metaphysics.¹⁰⁰ I now want to consider how Ṣadrā utilises it to prove divine unity in a more principled way. More specifically, I want to show how this idea links to other crucial concepts such as necessity, simplicity and unity in Ṣadrā's thought thereby giving it an overarching importance in different parts of Ṣadrā's metaphysics.

⁹⁸ Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Hikmat al-mutaʿālīyya*, 6:56.

⁹⁹ I discuss this principle (which I call the Simple Reality Principle) and its far-reaching implications, as well as its reception in the Qajar period, in a forthcoming article. If God is pure being and pure being is everything, then there is no 'other'; hence there is only God—and that in the Ṣadrian framework is *tawḥīd*. The fact that God's existence—or existence *per se*—encompasses the whole of reality does not imply that His existence is akin to a universal that encompasses all its particulars. Rather, His existence encapsulates being through another sense of encompassing (*shumūl*), one that Ṣadrā himself writes is 'only known to the mystics firmly rooted in knowledge' (*al-ʿurafāʾ al-rāsikhūn fi l-ʿilm*), alluding to Q. 3:7, and which in the *ʿirfānī* tradition is referred to as the Breath of the All-Merciful (*al-naḥas al-raḥmānī*). See Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Mashāʾir*, 340–41.

¹⁰⁰ Avicenna recognises perfection as a metaphysical property of the Necessary Being but he does not give it the same degree of importance as later thinkers like Suhrawardī and Ṣadrā. The historical roots of thinking about perfection as a metaphysical concept can of course be traced back to Plotinus, who conceived of the One as ἀπλῶς τέλειον (*aplōs teleion*), the Absolutely Perfect, and to Aristotle, who in *Metaphysics* XII.6–9 described the Unmoved Mover as pure actuality (ἐνέργεια)—the highest expression of perfection in the cosmos. In Avicenna's words, 'The Necessary Being is the True-Perfect (*al-kamāl al-ḥaqq*), having within itself no contingency or potentiality. In short, the Necessary Being has no privation or evil inside It; and It is the source of every perfection' (Avicenna, *al-Hidāya*, 263).

Our discussion thus far has shown that there is a linkage in Ṣadrā's thinking between a thing existing necessarily and it being maximally perfect. The Necessary Being is by Its nature a maximally perfect being—a being devoid of contingency and impossibility. Consequently, all perfections belong to the Necessary Being by necessity, without any deficiency or limitation. Since privation signifies an absence of being and the lack of a perfection, and because the Necessary Being is defined as existence in its most complete and unconditioned form (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), it must be absolutely simple—pure existence (*wujūd širf*), wholly unassociated with non-being in any respect. The Necessary Being cannot therefore have any 'aspect' or 'perspective' under which it might be said to be contingent or that its relation to some perfection may be said to be impossible.¹⁰¹ It is for this reason that Avicenna and later philosophers describe the Necessary Being as a being that is 'necessary in all respects'; necessary, that is, in relation to every *perfection* conceivable for It and hence a maximally perfect being.¹⁰² Avicenna argued for this principle, which I term the 'principle of absolute necessity', by examining the alternative hypothesis and considering its implications for a Necessary Being that is not necessary in all respects. He demonstrates that if the Necessary Being had just a single aspect in which its relation to a certain perfection is merely contingent then it would fail to be self-sufficient in that regard, and anything that is not self-sufficient is by definition a contingent being. Mullā Ṣadrā advanced this line of reasoning by explaining how contingency itself is grounded in essential non-being: an entity is contingent precisely because its essence *qua* itself fails to provide sufficient grounds for its own perfections.¹⁰³ A being that is not necessary in all respects is thus a composite of being and non-being from different aspects given that a single aspect cannot account for both being and its privation.¹⁰⁴

Building on these premises, Ṣadrā articulated a novel argument for divine unity grounded exclusively in the concept of maximal perfection (i.e. being absolutely necessary). He begins by positing the existence of two distinct Necessary Beings, A and B. By defi-

101 The terms 'aspect' and 'perspective' translate the Arabic word *jiha*, which is used to denote those attributes of the Necessary Being that are considered perfections for It (i.e. *al-ṣifāt al-kamālīyya*), such as knowledge, life and power. Therefore, the assertion that 'the Necessary Being is necessary in all aspects' just means that 'the Necessary Being is necessary with respect to every perfection that is conceivable for It'. See al-'Allāma al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Nihāyat al-ḥikma*, 2:93 (fn. 1); Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, *al-Taḥwīḥāt al-lawḥiyya wa-l-'arshīyya*, ed. Najafqulī Ḥabībī (Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Pazhūhashī-yi Hikmat u Falsafah-i Īrān, 1388Sh/[2009–2010]), 211.

102 It is not sufficient for the Necessary Being to have a perfection to just some degree, but rather It must possess whatever perfections are conceivable for It to a *maximal* degree. A Necessary Being is thus a perfect being in the utmost sense of perfection.

103 If A is contingent with respect to *x*, then this means that A *qua* itself is not *x* and that *x* may or may not exist for A. However, this cannot be the case with respect to the Necessary Being as it would imply that the perfection in question has no necessary or essential relation to the Necessary Being. This means that the Necessary Being *qua* itself does not have that perfection, and hence there is a privation at the level of the Necessary Being's essence. Such a being cannot be a maximally perfect being according to Ṣadrā.

104 For Mullā Ṣadrā's discussion of the principle of absolute necessity, see his *al-Hikmat al-muta'aliyya*, 1:142–149; idem., *Sharḥ al-Hidāya*, 2:157–164; cf. al-'Allāma al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Nihāyat al-ḥikma*, 1:93–7.

nition, a Necessary Being is maximally perfect, beyond which no greater perfection can be imagined or realised. Such a being possesses all perfections to their utmost degree. However, if A and B are distinct, they must be discernible realities, and since a being that is necessary of existence by itself cannot be individuated by accidental properties, their differentiation must be due to their essential properties. Yet, this leads to insurmountable contradictions. If A possesses a perfection that B lacks, then A is by definition more perfect than B, negating B's status as a maximally perfect being. Conversely, if B possesses a perfection that A lacks, then B would be superior to A, contradicting A's supposed maximal perfection. If both A and B possess perfections which the other lacks, then neither can be truly maximally perfect. In each scenario, then, Ṣadrā observes that what is purported to be a maximally perfect being is in reality less than maximally perfect, and each so-called 'Necessary Being' turns out to be comprised of both being and non-being given that each lacks a perfection which the other possesses.¹⁰⁵ This inherent deficiency renders the entity composite, possessing some perfections while being deprived of others. Ṣadrā terms this the composition of being and non-being (*tarkīb al-wujūd wa-l-'adam*), which followers of Ṣadrā's philosophy regard as the most problematic or 'evil' form of composition (*sharr al-tarākīb*). The reason is because it implies that non-being ('adam) has infiltrated into the very essence of existence (*wujūd*) itself, an impossibility for the Necessary Being whose nature must be pure undivided being (*al-wujūd al-ṣīrf*). By showing that any supposed plurality of Necessary Beings results in at least one aspect of essential non-being, Ṣadrā concludes that there can be only one maximally perfect being—one Necessary Being.

If besides the Necessary Being there existed another Necessary Being, then it would necessarily be distinct from it. [...] This implies that each of them has a rank of perfection in existence that does not belong to the other, which is neither an effect nor an emanation of the other, therefore implying that each of them lacks an existential perfection and is deprived of a second-order actualisation. Hence, the essence of each cannot be sheer actuality and necessity, but instead a thing whose essence is a referent of one thing's presence and another thing's absence, both belonging to the nature of existence *qua* existence. Its essence is not a pure existence nor a real one, therefore, and being a composite negates being essentially necessary. What is necessary of existence due to itself must therefore be of utmost actuality and perfect actualisation and something that combines all existential planes. There can be no equal to it in existence, nor can it have an opposite or likeness. Instead, its

¹⁰⁵ For example, if A has the perfection *x* but lacks the perfection *y*, and B has the perfection *y* but lacks the perfection *x*, then each would be perfect in one sense and deficient in another. In A's case, therefore, 'A *qua* itself is *x*, but not *y*' would be true, and this clearly is impossible given that there is a combination of being and non-being.

essence is not only the most perfect essence there is but also the ground of all other perfections, and this is the meaning of it being perfect and beyond perfection.¹⁰⁶

The conclusion is that there can never be more than one instance of sheer existence.

There is something intriguing in these arguments. The same could be said of anything that is merely itself. For example, the concept of *sheer* humanity—that is, human *qua* human—cannot have more than one instance either. In fact, anything that is multiplied or replicated across multiple instances cannot be just itself *extensionally* speaking. There can be multiple instances of humanity, for example, but only if humanity is conjoined with things besides humanity itself (e.g. particular spatial positions). The difference then is that whereas other concepts can be conceivably multiplied through multiple instances, the concept of a Necessary Being cannot. All instances of multiplication imply a combination of being and non-being. ‘Human’ is conceivably multiple because humanity can be conjoined to things apart from humanity, hence resulting in a combination of being (i.e. ‘human’) and non-being (i.e. ‘not-human’) in each instance. Zayd is a combination of his being a human, on the one hand, and his being not a human (e.g. a particular height, a particular weight), on the other. But this is impossible for the necessity of existence, because that which is necessary in all respects cannot be contingent in any respect whatsoever, and hence cannot be conjoined with anything that is not itself—namely, necessary of existence. Rather than attempting to explain how multiple Necessary Beings would be individuated, therefore, the inquiry is more fundamentally concerned with whether it is even logically conceivable for *wujūd*—existence in its purest form—to be subject to multiplication or replication.

This shift in perspective provides an independent proof for divine unity, one that has been formally recognised within the post-Ṣadrian philosophical tradition as *burhān al-ṣarāfa*, or ‘the proof from sheer simplicity’.¹⁰⁷ The core principle of this argument states that something which is purely and exclusively itself cannot be duplicated or repeated (*ṣirf al-shay’ lā yatathannā wa-lā yatakarrar*).¹⁰⁸ To illustrate this, consider the quiddity ‘human’. When we reflect on *ṣirf al-insān*—humanity in its most unadulterated sense—we are contemplating the very notion of human *qua* itself, stripped of all accidental attributes.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, 1:51; cf. idem, *al-Hikmat al-muta’aliyya*, 1:156–57; idem., *Sharḥ al-Hidāya*, 2:155–6; idem., *Asrār al-āyāt*, 63; idem., *al-Mashā’ir*, 385–86; idem., *al-Masā’il al-qudsiyya*, 246–48.

¹⁰⁷ The term *simplicity* in this context is open to equivocation. Here, it refers not to the standard metaphysical notion of a thing lacking compositionality but to something being unmixed with anything other than itself. For example, human in its pure and simple form is just human, even though it can be analysed in terms of animality and rationality. To consider *human* in its simplicity, then, is to regard it solely as rational animal—nothing more, nothing less.

¹⁰⁸ The Arabic word *ṣirf* is difficult to translate into English, but its semantic meaning conveys the sense of something being unmixed, pure, and unattached to anything apart from itself.

¹⁰⁹ It may be argued that a thing considered in this way is to be understood analytically as it being considered with the condition of nothing else alongside it (*bi-sharṭ lā*). In the context of our discussion, *ṣirf*

In this purely undifferentiated state there is no logical possibility of duplication, for there is nothing extrinsic to mark one instance as distinct from another. Hence, two instances of *ṣirf al-insān* would be identical. To speak of multiple instances of *ṣirf al-insān* would therefore be incoherent, for in every attempt to identify a second occurrence we would be left with the same undifferentiated notion without any criterion to individuate them. This stands in stark contrast to the case of two particular human beings such as Zayd and ‘Amr. While both are instances of ‘human,’ they are not instantiations of *ṣirf al-insān*.¹¹⁰ Rather, they are accompanied by individuating characteristics—physical, temporal, and spatial distinctions—that allow for their differentiation. It is these additional attributes that permit multiplicity among particular instances of a general concept. However, sheer existence (*al-wujūd al-ṣirf*) does not admit of any such individuating attributes, for it is not conditioned by any limiting factor. It is existence in its most fundamental and unqualified form, devoid of all admixture with non-being. Since individuation requires some principle of distinction, and since *al-wujūd al-ṣirf* is an absolute reality untainted by negation or limitation, the very notion of a second instance becomes unintelligible. The principle *ṣirf al-shay’ lā yatahannā wa-lā yatakarrar* thus serves as a philosophical corollary to the principle of indiscernibility, and affirms that there can be no multiplicity of concepts *qua* themselves.

This line of thinking provides a powerful demonstration of the Necessary Being’s uniqueness which does not merely reject the possibility of multiple deities on metaphysical grounds but establishes through pure logical reasoning that the very structure of existence itself precludes any form of multiplicity within necessary existence. In doing so, it upholds the doctrine of *tawḥīd* as an inescapable conclusion derived from the nature of being itself.¹¹¹ This is one reason why ‘God witnesses that there is no god but He’ (Q. 3:18), because if God, the Necessary Being, is pure existence, then pure existence itself is what precludes there being another like it.¹¹² This is because had it been possible for the necessity of existence to be duplicated or repeated it would no longer be just sheer existence, for in order for there to be multiple instances there would also have had to be something else besides just sheer existence that makes each Necessary Being a discernible reality distinct from others. The very idea of there being something that is just ‘sheer existence’ is therefore defeated from the outset. The argument therefore demonstrates that if there is a Necessary Being that is just sheer existence then there can only be one instance of it.¹¹³

al-wujūd is the same analytically speaking as *al-wujūd bi-sharṭ lā*, ‘existence with the condition that it is not accompanied by anything apart from existence’. This is explicitly noted by Ṣadrā’s commentators; see for example Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, *Sharḥ al-Manẓūma*, 1:445.

110 Based on what I have said in the previous footnote, Zayd instantiates ‘human without any conditions’ (*al-insān lā bi-sharṭ*) but not ‘human with the condition of nothing else’ (*al-insān bi-sharṭ lā*).

111 For Ṣadrā’s presentation of this argument, see his *al-Mabda’ wa-l-ma’ād*, 1: 87, 90; idem., *Asrār al-āyāt*, 57–8. See also Mullā Ismā‘īl al-Iṣfahānī, *Sharḥ al-Hikmat al-‘arshīyya*, 433.

112 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Hikmat al-muta‘ālīyya*, 6:23, 129; idem., *Sharḥ al-Hidāya*, 2:154.

113 For Ṣadrā’s presentation of this argument, see his *al-Mabda’ wa-l-ma’ād*, 1: 87, 90. See also Mullā Ismā‘īl

By his own admission Ṣadrā's use of this argument is directly sourced from the insights of the twelfth-century Illuminationist philosopher Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī. In his *Tabwīḥāt*, Suhrawardī remarks that:

Being in the purest sense (*ṣirf al-wujūd*), besides which there is nothing more perfect, whenever [and wherever] a second [instance of it] is supposed [to exist] is upon reflection merely just itself. For there can be no distinctions within a thing in its purest sense. Whatever, then, is mixed with being cannot be the aforementioned Necessary Being. Since whatever the mind separates into a quiddity and existence is not incapable of having an accidental predicate nor is it something [whose meaning] cannot be shared [among many things]. How can this be otherwise when it must, by necessity, be something that belongs to one of the categories. Take note! For these are indeed inspirations from the Divine Throne! And take heed, therefore, that whatever exists necessarily cannot, as a matter of principle, be multiplied through multiple instances, so there can never be two Necessary Beings in existence.¹¹⁴

In his marginal comments on Ṣadrā's *Asfār*, Sabzawārī presents the argument from *ṣarāfa* in its proper logical form. The argument begins with the assertion that pure being represents existence in its most fundamental and unqualified state devoid of any determinations or limitations. All conditions—positive or negative—have been removed. This premise establishes the conceptual foundation for what follows. The crucial move in Sabzawārī's reasoning emerges in his second premise, where he demonstrates that the very nature of what exists in its purest sense precludes the possibility of distinction or differentiation. This follows from the recognition that distinction requires some basis of difference, yet pure being—by definition—admits of no such qualifying features that could serve as grounds for differentiation. The logic here is that if something exists in absolute purity (*ṣirf al-shay'*), there can be no features or characteristics that would allow us to distinguish one instance from another, as any such distinguishing marks would constitute a departure from pure unqualified being. From these premises, he draws the desired conclusion that pure being must be unique and irreplicable. This conclusion leads to other important observations, one being that multiplicity or duplication at the level of pure being is not merely contingently absent but logically impossible. This conclusion carries significant implications for understanding the relationship between unity and multiplicity in existence. Any apparent multiplicity must be understood as occurring at a derivative level, where pure being has already undergone some form of determination or qualification. Manyness is thus a hallmark of qualified existence, not

al-Isfāhānī, *Sharḥ al-Ḥikmat al-ʿarshiyya*, 433.

114 Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, *al-Tabwīḥāt*, 206; cf. Ibn Kammūna, *al-Kāshif (al-Jadīd fī l-ḥikma)*; Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-mutaʿālīyya*, 1:155–56.

existence *per se*. As Ṣadrā explains in his *Asrār al-āyāt*, the very notion of there being a duality or twoness in the concept of sheer existence is impossible, nevermind the question of whether there are two instances of it or not in reality. In other words, there is a logical impossibility, never mind an ontological one, in the very notion of there being two pure existences that are necessarily existent.¹¹⁵

5. *Tawḥīd* and Numerical Oneness

This brings us to the final section of this study: the concept of ‘oneness’ itself. As we have seen, the term ‘one’ can be understood in at least two different senses. The oneness of pure being—singular and irreplicable—stands in stark contrast to the oneness of ordinary entities such as human beings which can exist in multiple instances.¹¹⁶ Given this complexity, Shīʿī *mutakallimūn*, philosophers, and mystics have been meticulous in ensuring that God’s uniqueness is correctly articulated, a concern that arises from the necessity of distinguishing between the different senses in which ‘oneness’ can be predicated. Notably, the recorded statements of the Shīʿī Imams suggest that they too were acutely aware of this distinction. Imam ‘Alī, regarded as the preeminent source of wisdom (*ḥikma*) in Shīʿī Islam, articulated four distinct perspectives on divine oneness, asserting that only two accurately capture its true nature.¹¹⁷

The concept of ‘oneness’ (*waḥda*) signifies that a thing is indivisible from the perspective in which it is said to be ‘one.’ Broadly, this can be categorised into two types: (1) essential oneness (*al-wāḥid al-ḥaqīqī*) and (2) non-essential oneness (*al-wāḥid ghayr al-ḥaqīqī*). Essential oneness is further divided into (1a) true essential oneness (*al-waḥda al-ḥaqqa al-ḥaqīqiyya*) and (1b) nominal essential oneness, the latter often referred to as ‘numerical oneness’ (*al-waḥda al-ʿadadiyya*). Given these distinctions, we must ask: when the Qurʾān declares, ‘Your God is one God; there is no god besides Him’ (Q. 2:163), in what specific sense is divine oneness being affirmed? Addressing this question requires first clarifying the meaning of these various types of oneness—particularly, the distinction between true essential oneness and numerical oneness.

Numerical oneness is a familiar concept—one that we typically have in mind when we speak of something being ‘one.’ However, an entity is described as numerically one when the thing itself and the oneness attributed to it are not identical. For example, in the statement, ‘There is one pen on the table,’ the subject is qualified by numerical oneness, but the concept of pen *qua* pen is distinct from the concept of one *qua* one.

115 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asrār al-āyāt*, 57 where Ṣadrā explains that the existence of two pure existences is *muḥāl al-farḍ*, i.e. impossible to conceive.

116 As Avicenna and other philosophers point out, ‘one,’ like ‘being,’ is predicated with ambiguity (*maqūl bi-l-tashkīk*).

117 al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Sayyid Ḥāshim al-Ḥussaynī al-Ṭihrānī (Qom: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1430/[2008–2009]), 81 *hadith* no. 3.

In this case, oneness functions as an extrinsic rather than an intrinsic part of the pen's essence. This distinction explains why the number of pens can be one or many. If 'being one' were identical to 'being a pen' or a part thereof, then the number of pens could never exceed one.

Numerical oneness is thus defined by the possibility of repeated instantiation. If I am holding one pen, and then pick up another, I now have 'two pens.' The addition of a second pen is neither logically incoherent nor metaphysically problematic, nor would be the addition of a third or a fourth. This is because numerical oneness presupposes a certain finitude, a limitation in existence. A single pen is one, but not infinite; therefore, it allows for the possibility of other pens existing alongside it. In contrast, if a pen were infinite—an 'infinite pen,' so to speak—there would be no logical space for a second pen. What this shows is that in order for something to be countable, it must possess a finite existence. There is thus a fundamental link between countability and ontological limitation. If countability and finitude characterise numerical oneness, then 'true essential oneness' refers to that which is 'one' in a way that excludes the very possibility of multiplicity. Such an entity is not only unique but necessarily so, because its infinitude precludes the existence of anything else like it.¹¹⁸ In the context of our discussion this means that just as God is necessarily existent He is also necessarily one, and, more importantly, that 'there is nothing like Him' (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay'*).

When the Qur'an states, 'Your God is one God,' therefore, this statement can be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is that 'one' refers to numerical oneness, meaning that while it is a fact that there is only one God, there is no logical impossibility in the idea of there being more than one. By contrast, the second interpretation understands the predicate 'one' as referring to true essential oneness, and on that basis affirms the subject's infinity whilst also eliminating the possibility of there being further instances of the same. Therefore, while both readings affirm the unity of God, they have starkly different implications for the possibility of plurality. The first affirms unity but does not deny the logical possibility of plurality, whereas the second affirms unity but also denies the logical possibility of its instances being multiplied.

The modern Shī'ī philosopher al-'Allāma al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī draws upon the philosophical notion of true essential oneness in his commentary on those Qur'anic verses that explicitly affirm God's unity. In particular, he observes that whenever the Qur'an describes God as

118 As al-'Allāma al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī explains, true essential oneness is 'a kind of unity with which the presumption of any kind of multiplicity is impossible' (*al-waḥda allatī yastahīlu ma'ahā farḍ al-takaththur*); see al-'Allāma al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Bidāyat al-ḥikma*, 157; cf. idem, *Nihāyat al-ḥikma*, 1:241, 2:225. Given that things predicated with true essential oneness cannot be multiplied, they are often referred to as 'one in the non-numerical sense' (*al-wāḥid bi-l-'adad*), unlike things that are one but capable of being multiplied, in which case their unity or oneness is referred to as numerical oneness (*al-wāḥid bi-l-'adad*). In the Shī'ī tradition, the Imams described God as one in the non-numerical sense. For more on this aspect of Shī'ī scholarship, see Zoheir Esmail's contribution in this volume.

being 'one', it frequently qualifies this oneness with the attribute *al-qahhār*.¹¹⁹ This term has been rendered in various ways in modern English translations, but regardless of the specific word chosen, the Qur'an undeniably associates God's oneness with *qāhiriyya*, prompting the question: why? For Ṭabāṭabā'ī, this linguistic detail provides an important hermeneutical opportunity to explore the philosophical implications of divine unity. From a grammatical perspective, *al-qahhār* is the intensified active participle of the root *q-h-r* (to overpower, subjugate). By ascribing this quality to God's oneness, the Qur'an implicitly rejects any notion of divine unity being characterised by the passive participle *maqhūr* (overpowered or subdued). Ṭabāṭabā'ī argues that this distinction is significant: the Qur'an not only affirms God's unity but also emphasises His absolute dominance, thereby rejecting in his view a purely numerical understanding of oneness.

For Ṭabāṭabā'ī, then, whenever the Qur'an declares God's oneness, it does more than simply assert that there is only one God—it also *negates* the very possibility of any other divine or quasi-divine entities. This is not a weak metaphysical claim, but a strong one. Such an assertion is particularly important within the historical context of the Qur'an's revelation. According to Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the *mushrikūn* of seventh-century Arabia did not practice outright polytheism but rather adhered to a form of henotheism. While the Qur'an condemns their beliefs as *shirk*, their theology suggests that they acknowledged Allah as the supreme deity while also venerating lesser deities for intercession or worldly benefits.¹²⁰ Thus, the primary mission of the Qur'an was not merely to affirm belief in Allah but to categorically reject the existence of any other divine or quasi-divine beings. One way the Qur'an accomplishes this, according to Ṭabāṭabā'ī, is by describing God as *al-Wāḥid al-Qahhār*—a formulation that decisively refutes the notion of numerical oneness and underscores His absolute and unparalleled supremacy.

The Qur'an in its highest teachings denies numerical oneness (*al-waḥdat al-ʿa-dadiyya*) of God. This kind of oneness exists only by virtue of this 'one thing' being distinguished from this other 'one thing' due to the finitude [of their being] that rules over them and the measurability [of their quantities] that overpowers them. An example of this is the water in a river. When this water is divided into different containers, then the water contained inside each of them is 'one water', but it is not the same as the other waters in the other containers, which are also 'one water' in

119 See Qur'an 12:39, 14:48, 38:65, 39:4, 40:16.

120 See al-ʿAllāma al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Qom: Muʾssasah-i Maṭbūʿātī-yi Ismāʿīliyyān, 1973), 16:148, commentary on Q. 29:61 (also 31:25, 39:38). Elsewhere in the Qur'an the *mushrikūn* are reported as saying, 'We only worship them so they may bring us closer to Allah in position' (Q. 39:3), an attitude which suggests a belief in a hierarchy where Allah was supreme, but the intercessors were necessary for gaining divine favour. The *mushrikūn*'s error, Ṭabāṭabā'ī argues, was not that they denied the existence of Allah, but rather that they failed to worship Him alone by admitting the existence of other lesser deities. Cf. Patricia Crone, 'The Religion of the Qurʾānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities', *Arabica* 57 (2010): 151–200.

their own right. The only reason each of them is 'one water' and distinguishable from the others is because what is contained in the other containers is negated from it; they do not all exist together in one container, but are separated [...] If God is affirmed to be the overpowerer and not the one overpowered, the one who subjugates and not who is subjugated by anything whatsoever, then there is no way of conceiving a numerical oneness or numerical plurality for Him.¹²¹

At the core of these claims is the metaphysical assertion that a thing's distinction and separability—qualities that coexist with its unity and oneness—stem from the finitude of its existence. The implication is that God's existence, being infinite, cannot logically permit the simultaneous existence of other beings, whether divine or contingent, alongside Him. For Ṭabāṭabā'ī, a holistic reading of Qur'anic verses pertaining to God, His existence, and His attributes affirms the philosophical and mystical view that all perfections belong exclusively to God. He is the Perfect Being and by virtue of His perfection He bestows all other beings with whatever perfections they possess. Nothing possesses any perfection except insofar as it is already present in God.¹²²

Like Ṣadrā, Ṭabāṭabā'ī therefore also identifies the Necessary Being as a maximally perfect being. God possesses all perfections to greatest extent possible and He is the source of these perfections in other beings. This is supported by numerous verses of the Qur'an on the one hand and a robust metaphysics on the other. If the Necessary Being lacks a certain perfection then His being is characterised by privation. This means two things: (1) that it is a combination of being and non-being and (2) that it is finite, both of which entail its being contingent. Its finitude results from the fact that it is limited by privation: when something lacks a perfection, it is limited with respect to that thing. But a Necessary Being is sheer existence and therefore does not have any privations, and hence it cannot be limited—metaphysically speaking—in any sense whatsoever. In the context of divine unity, this means that because God's existence is sheer existence, and because whatever is sheer existence has to be infinite, the unity that is predicated of Him can only be true essential oneness (*al-waḥdat al-ḥaqīqiyya al-ḥaqqa*). This unity overpowers and subjugates the possibility of reproduction, replication or duplication, and thus negates the possibility of any other Necessary Being. In essence, there is a complete ontological overlap between the concepts of unity and (necessary) being: pure being is truly one, and whatever is truly one can only be sheer existence. This is the Necessary Being.

In light of the foregoing analysis, it is evident that Ibn Kammūna's counterargument against divine unity does not stand when examined through the lens of the Ṣadrian tradition. While Ibn Kammūna challenges Avicenna's proof by arguing that multiple Necessary Beings could exist with distinct yet unknowable essences, this critique is

¹²¹ al-'Allāma al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 6:88.

¹²² Ibid., 89.

tantamount to an equivocal understanding of existence that Ṣadrā explicitly rejects. Central to Ṣadrā's metaphysics is the doctrine of the modulation of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), which posits that existence is a single graded reality rather than a collection of disparate, unrelated essences (and/or existences). This perspective allows Ṣadrā and those who followed his philosophical scheme to dissolve Ibn Kammūna's objection by demonstrating that any putative second Necessary Being would be either (1) a manifestation of the same reality of necessary existence, in which case it would not be truly distinct, or (2) a being whose necessity of existence is qualified by limitation, thereby rendering it contingent rather than necessary. Furthermore, Ṣadrā's commitment to the principle that pure being (*wujūd širf*) is necessarily one and indivisible reinforces the impossibility of multiple Necessary Beings. If God is maximally perfect and infinite in His existence, as the Ṣadrian framework asserts, then any other putative Necessary Being would either partake in this perfection—rendering it identical to God—or fall short of it, making it contingent. The notion of a second Necessary Being thus collapses into incoherence, as it would either be redundant or lack the very attributes that define necessary existence.

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Logico-linguistic Analysis of the *Kalimat al-Tawḥīd*: al-Rāzī vs al-Kūrānī

Yusuf Daşdemir¹

The first part of the *Kalima* is blasphemy while the last is belief ... Do not be stuck in the first station but move to the second!

Majd al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ghazālī²

The succinct and striking formulation of Islamic monotheism, the Word of Unification (*kalimat al-tawḥīd*), ‘there is no deity but God’ (*Lā ilāha illā Allāh*), lies at the very centre of Islam, and its heartfelt articulation has been viewed as the basic manifestation of Muslim identity. Commensurate with this importance, the *Kalimat al-tawḥīd* (hereafter: *Kalima*) has been subject to great scrutiny from multiple disciplinary perspectives, resulting in a plethora of literature on the topic. Scholars of the Arabic linguistic sciences, for example, paid great attention to aspects of the *Kalima* relevant to their studies.³

With Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), one of the founding figures of the post-classical period of Islamic thought, discussions about the *Kalima* took on a new dimension. Al-Rāzī introduced a range of logical and philosophical considerations to the discussion, such as the denial of essence itself (*naḥy al-māhiyya*), which involves the question of whether it is conceivable to deny an essence independently, without reference to its connection to any predicate. When one asserts, for example, ‘No deity!’ in the *Kalima*, would the denial pertain to the essence of deity (*ulūhiyya*) in and of itself, or rather to its relation to existence? This move caused the discussion to be carried out in the more general context of philosophical problems, such as the reality of essence in itself and its relation to existence and whether essences are made (*majʿūla*), the central topics of Islamic philosophy and theology after Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 428/1037).

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2 Majd al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *al-Tajrīd fī kalimat al-tawḥīd* (MS Ankara: National Library, Collection of Manuscripts A 1263), fols. 23a7–9.

3 Despite this relatively intense interest in the *Kalima* in classical sources, to the best of my knowledge, there is a notable absence of studies on the *Kalima* and particularly on its linguistic, logical, and philosophical features in the secondary literature.

The fifteenth-century Persian scholar Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 908/1502) added yet another dimension to the issue when he authored two treatises on the *Kalima*,⁴ one in Persian and one in Arabic, and in his preface to the Arabic treatise, promised to point out how such features relate to issues of purely rational investigation and of revealed theology. More significantly, he dedicated, for the first time as far as I am aware, one of the five parts of his treatise to the logical analysis of the *Kalima* so as to determine what kind of proposition it is. Rather short and based on only one grammatical interpretation of the *Kalima*, this analysis would be later both criticised and expanded by Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d. 1101/1690).⁵

A Sufi of the Akbarian tradition as well as a prolific author with more than a hundred works on controversial issues of his time, al-Kūrānī authored two works devoted to the *Kalima*: *Inbāh al-anbāh ‘alā i’rāb Lā ilāha illā Allāh* and *‘Ujālat dhawī al-intibāh fī taḥqīq i’rāb Lā ilāha illā Allāh*.⁶ In the *Inbāh*, very probably the most comprehensive work ever written on the subject, he discusses in depth not only syntactical, but also philosophical, theological, and jurisprudential problems that originate from the *Kalima* by frequently citing and quoting numerous scholars. The two names above, al-Rāzī and al-Dawānī, however, bear the brunt of al-Kūrānī’s dialectical attacks.

This paper will examine the philosophical, logical, and linguistic treatment of the *Kalima* by al-Rāzī and al-Kūrānī,⁷ who represent to a large extent two main strands of philosophy in the post-classical era, namely, philosophical *kalām* and Akbarian Sufism, respectively. It will show that these discussions revolve around two main problems:

- (1) Is the *Kalima* a complete (*tāmm*) sentence as it is?
- (2) How many and what propositions does the *Kalima* contain?

The first syntactical question brings us to the philosophical problem of whether the denial of an essence in itself is conceivable. As will be seen shortly, while al-Rāzī argues that one could deny an essence itself with no reference to its relation to any predicate and therefore the *Kalima* is a complete sentence, al-Kūrānī contends that denial pertains only to a relation between an essence and a predicate, which is why the *Kalima* is not

4 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī, ‘Fi kalimat al-tawḥīd’, in *Khams rasā’il li-l-‘Allāma Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī*, ed. Anwar F. ‘Ulwānī al-Zu‘ayrī (Cairo: Dār al-Imām al-Rāzī, 2021), 131–41; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī, *Tahlīlīyya sharḥ lā ilāha illā Allāh*, ed. F. Farīdūnī Firūzanda (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Gayhān, 1953), 27–74. In the latter, which is in Persian, al-Dawānī does not devote notable attention to the logical aspects of the *Kalima*.

5 On al-Kūrānī’s milieu, life, and works, see Naser Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life in the Ḥijāz before Wahhabism: Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī’s (d. 1101/1690) Theology of Sufism* (Leiden: Brill, 2022); Ömer Yılmaz, *İbrahim Kūrānī Hayatı, Eserleri ve Tasavvuf Anlayışı* (Istanbul: İnsan Yay., 2005).

6 The latter is a rather brief summary of the former, which was edited by Ahmet Gemi in *Kelime-i Tevhidin İrâbı* (Ankara: İlahiyât, 2019), 65–412. The latter was also edited in Muṣṭafā S. al-Māziq, ‘Ujālat dhawī al-intibāh fī taḥqīq i’rāb lā ilāha illā Allāh li-Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī’, *Majallat Shimāl Janūb*, no. 12 (2018): 21–45.

7 Al-Dawānī will only be occasionally cited because his treatise has little that we could not find in al-Rāzī.

complete as it is. The second question, on the other hand, is logical in nature, which yields a very significant theological quandary, namely, whether the *Kalima* signifies the existence of God. The two questions are also interconnected because if the *Kalima* is a complete sentence, then it contains only one proposition, but if it is not – that is, if it has some implicit elements – then there must be more than one proposition. The former position will be defended by al-Rāzī while the latter by al-Kūrānī.

This study consists of two sections, which address the two questions above, respectively. It aims to substantiate by this specific example the view that there are many concepts and discussions in the works of linguistic and Islamic sciences of post-classical Islam that are clearly of a logical and philosophical nature.

1. The Completeness of the *Kalima*

To begin, some basic Arabic grammar necessary to understand the debate is in order. In Arabic, there are mainly two types of sentence: nominal (*ismīyya*) and verbal (*fiʿliyya*). A sentence is nominal if it begins with a noun and verbal if it begins with a verb. In either case, the sentence is complete (*mufīd*) with at least two elements, the subject (*musnad ilayh*) and the predicate (*musnad*). The subject of a nominal sentence is called the ‘topic’ (*mubtadaʾ*) and its predicate is called the ‘report’ (*khavar*). In the verbal structure, the predicate comes as a ‘verb’ (*fiʿl*) at the beginning of the sentence while the subject following it functions as its ‘agent’ (*fāʿil*).⁸ These two elements, nonetheless, might not always be available, but may be elided, in the utterance of the sentence. This linguistic phenomenon, which is called *idmār*, ‘indicates the suppression of an element that may be reconstructed from the context’ and that is ‘necessary for the explanation of the surface structure’.⁹ In such a case of suppression, ‘it is the grammarian’s task to reconstruct these hidden elements in order to explain the surface structure of the sentence’¹⁰ and this procedure of reconstruction or restitution is called *taqdīr*.

In the context of this paper, therefore, if the *Kalima* is thought of as a verbal sentence, it will need a verb and an agent, explicit or implicit, to be complete, but if it is a nominal sentence, then it will need a topic and a report. In order to prove that the sentence is

8 For the earliest sources of these classifications, see ‘Amr b. ‘Uthmān Sibawayhi, *al-Kitāb*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām M. Hārūn, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1988), 1:23; Abū Bakr Ibn al-Sarrāj, *al-Uṣūl fi al-naḥw*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn al-Fatī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1996), 58–59. For modern explications of the issue, see William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898), 250–51; Kees Versteegh, ‘Isnād’, in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, gen. ed. Kees Versteegh (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 2:434–37.

9 Michael C. Carter and Kees Versteegh, ‘Idmār’, in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, 2:301. For a comprehensive account of the conditions and types of *idmār*, see Ibn Hishām al-Anṣārī, *Mughnī al-labīb ‘an kutub al-aʿrīb*, ed. Muḥammad M. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 1991), 2:692–749.

10 Kees Versteegh, ‘Taqdīr’, in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, 4:446.

complete, one has to show, in the latter case, that its topic and report are explicit, and if they are not, one must reconstruct the elided elements. Al-Rāzī takes the first option by interpreting the *Kalima* as a verbal sentence, arguing that both its verb and agent are explicit in the surface structure, whereas al-Kūrānī takes it as a nominal sentence to argue that, although its topic is explicit, its report is implicit. As a sentence with the necessary elements, al-Rāzī claims, the *Kalima* is complete and capable of conveying its intended meaning without any additions.¹¹ I will call this view *the completionist reading* of the *Kalima*. According to the majority, including al-Kūrānī, however, it is necessary on linguistic and logical grounds to reconstruct the *Kalima* with some implied elements, which I will call *the restitutionist reading*.

1.1 The Completionist Reading

Both in his *Tafsīr* and *Lawāmiʿ al-bayyināt*, al-Rāzī opens the discussion by questioning the opposite position, that is, the restitutionist reading. He first explains that most grammarians suggest that the *Kalima* needs to be reconstructed with certain additional phrases, among which ‘for us’ (*la-nā*) and ‘in existence’ (*fī al-wujūd*) often prevail.¹² However, neither could satisfy al-Rāzī: the first signifies only the unity of *our* god, but not any god in the absolute sense. This is evidently far from the perfect sense of ‘God’s being one’. The latter, though free from this deficiency, is also questionable in that the sentence ‘There is no deity *in existence* save God’ denies only the existence of a second god, but the *Kalima* as it is denies the essence (*māhiyya*) of a second god, and represents a more robust assertion of God’s uniqueness than merely denying a second deity’s existence. Consequently, al-Rāzī deems it more appropriate (*awlā*) to read the *Kalima* without any implied additions.¹³

Regarding the question of why denying the essence of a second deity would be a more emphatic way of conveying *tawhīd*, al-Rāzī raises the following argument:

[t1] This is because our statement ‘No man’ (*Lā rajul*) [for example] implies the denial (*naḡy*) of this essence and once this essence is denied (*intaḡat*), all its individuals (*aḡrāduḡā*) would be denied as well on account of the fact that if one of the individuals of this essence were to obtain (*ḡaṡala*), then when that individual

11 Before al-Rāzī, such prominent grammarians as Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī argued for the completeness of the *Kalima*, but on a different reading. To him, ‘*Lā ilāha*’ was the foregrounded report (*al-khabar al-muqaddam*) and ‘*illā Allāh*’ the backgrounded topic (*al-mubtadaʿ al-muʾakkhar*): ‘Masʿala fī kalimat al-shahāda’, ed. Muḡammad A. al-Dāllī, *Majallat Majmaʿ al-Lughā al-ʿArabīyya bi-Dimashq*, no. 68 (1993): 86.

12 The *Kalima* would accordingly be reconstituted as either *Lā ilāha la-nā illa Allāh* (‘There is no deity for us save God’) or *Lā ilāha fī al-wujūd illa Allāh* (‘There is no deity in existence save God’).

13 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr aw Maḡāṡih al-ghayb*, ed. Sayyid ʿAmrān (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2012), 2:469–70; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmiʿ al-bayyināt sharḡ asmāʿ Allāh taʿālā wa-l-ṡiḡāt*, ed. Muḡammad Badr al-Dīn al-Niʿsānī (Cairo: al-Maṡbaʿa al-Sharafiyya, 1905), 93.

obtains, the essence would obtain too, which would contradict what the utterance signifies, namely, that the essence is denied. It is established then that our expression 'No man' implies a general, comprehensive negation. If one adds after that 'but Zayd' (*illā Zayd*), this will convey perfect, definite unity.¹⁴

Here we are given significant clues about how al-Rāzī identifies the necessary elements, the subject and predicate, of the *Kalima*. First, he seems to have viewed it as a verbal sentence, in which *lā* functions as the predicate by standing for the verb 'is denied' (*intaḥā*) while the noun following *lā* functions as the subject of the sentence, that is, the agent of the verb. If this is the case, then the *Kalima*, as a verbal sentence with a verb and its agent, will be a complete sentence. Yet this account seems vulnerable to the objection al-Kūrānī would later raise that, grammatically speaking, it is not possible to argue that *lā* stands for a verb in this way.¹⁵

The text also reveals al-Rāzī's rationale for his claim that denying the essence of a second deity would express a stronger form of divine unity: once the essence is denied, there would be no way for its individuals to exist at all. However, does not 'denying an essence' sound somewhat strange? Might he have meant by this that the essence did not have any extramentally existent instances? In that case, however, his interpretation would be no different from the *Kalima*'s second interpretation above together with 'in existence', that is, 'There is no deity *in existence* save God'. Hence, al-Rāzī must have been talking about a reading of the *Kalima* with no reference to existence, a reading that negates the essence in itself without considering its relation to anything else. To do so, he would first have to prove the possibility of such a negation.

Before moving on to his argument, let us consider his analysis of the syntactical status of the *Kalima*'s last part, *illā Allāh*. If *Lā ilāha* is a complete sentence, signifying that the essence of deity is denied, then what is the syntactical function of the last part of the *Kalima*? For al-Rāzī, the expression of *illā* in the *Kalima* has the same meaning or function as *ghayr*, 'other than',¹⁶ and therefore *illā Allāh* is a complementary part of the agent in the sentence;¹⁷ the agent in the *Kalima* as a verbal sentence is not *ilāh* alone, but rather *ilāh* along with its descriptive complement, *illā Allāh*. It is this combination, *ilāha illā Allāh*, 'any deity other than God' – that is, a second god, or a counterpart of God – that the *Kalima* denies in a conclusive way, according to al-Rāzī. Therefore, the *Kalima* is a complete verbal sentence with *Lā* as its predicate and *ilāha illā Allāh* as its subject, meaning that the essence of any deity other than God is denied.

Let us now turn to al-Rāzī's argument for the possibility of the denial of an essence:

14 al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 2:269; al-Rāzī, *Lawāmi'*, 97.

15 Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī, 'Inbāh al-anbāh 'alā i'rāb lā ilāha illā Allāh', in *Kelime-i Tevhidin İrābı*, 279–80.

16 On *ghayr*, see Abdurrahman Ali Mihirig, 'On the Linguistic and Technical Meanings of *Ghayr* and Their Consequences for Understanding the Divine Attributes in Classical Kalām', *Kader* 20, no. 3 (2022): 894–921.

17 al-Rāzī, *Lawāmi'*, 94–95.

[t2] If one says: How could one conceive the denial of essences? When you say, 'Black is not black,' it becomes a judgement that blackness is not blackness, which is not conceivable.¹⁸ But if you say, 'Blackness does not exist,' that would be reasonable, regular, and proper. We would respond: The denial of an essence is inevitable because when you say, 'Blackness does not exist,' you deny the existence, and existence qua existence is an essence. This means that when you deny it [i.e. existence], you deny the essence that is called existence. If the denial of this essence qua essence is conceivable, why would it be inconceivable to deny that essence as well?¹⁹

Appealing to common sense, al-Rāzī's dialectical opponent questions the very possibility of denying essences. For her, this is nothing but to say that the essence is not itself, for example, blackness is not blackness, which is inconceivable. Therefore, she concludes, al-Rāzī should insert existence in the negation and say that blackness is not existent, that is, there is nothing in existence that is black. However, as noted above, if al-Rāzī were to accept this move, then it would commit him to the reading of the *Kalima* with the addition of 'in existence', which would imply that the *Kalima* is not complete in its surface structure. He counters this objection with a new argument that yields a conclusion contradictory to the opponent's: denying an essence is inevitable, that is, necessary. This is because, he insists, by saying 'Blackness does not exist', one denies nothing but the essence that is called 'existence' due to the fact that existence is also an essence in itself. And if the denial of existence qua essence in itself is conceivable, then it necessarily follows that denying an essence is perfectly possible.

Al-Rāzī's opponent, however, takes the floor again to correct al-Rāzī's misunderstanding or distortion: in the sentence 'Blackness does not exist' it is neither existence (*wujūd*) nor the essence (*māhiyya*), that is, blackness, that is denied but the essence's being attributed existence (*mawṣūfiyyat al-māhiyya bi-l-wujūd*). In other words, this sentence denies the relation that the essence stands in to existence, which I call 'attributedness'. This time al-Rāzī puts forward his second argument to show that denying an essence is still inevitable:

[t3] The essence's being attributed existence is either separate from both the essence and existence or not. If it is separate from both, then denying it would amount to denying an essence. [This means] that denying an essence qua essence is possible. ... If the attributedness is not something separate from both, then the denial of it means nothing but a denial of an essence or a denial of existence. In this case, the explanation given above holds again. Therefore, it is established that our

18 The *Lawāmi'* version of the argument explains why this is not conceivable: because this amounts to something's changing into its contradictory, and the change of essences (*qalb al-haqā'iq*) is impossible (ibid., 93).

19 al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 2:470.

statement *Lā ilāha illā Allāh* is true and correct with no need at all to presume anything implicit.²⁰

Here al-Rāzī's purpose seems to show that it would make no difference even if the denial is taken as targetting the essence's being attributed existence. This relational property of attributedness, he claims, is either something different from its *relata* or something identical to either. In the former case, the denial is directed to the attributedness alone, but if the attributedness considered in itself is also an essence, then denying an essence in itself should be possible. In the latter case, that is, if the attributedness is identical either to the essence or existence, the denial then attaches to either essence or existence, but in both cases, it relates to an essence, as al-Rāzī showed in t2. That is, whatever the case, the denial of essence qua essence is not only possible but also inevitable, because every attempt to negate something ultimately culminates in the denial of an essence in itself. If this is the case, then the *Kalima* is complete as a verbal sentence that denies the essence of any god other than God. Notice here that al-Rāzī does not categorically deny the denial of existence but reduces it to the denial of an essence itself.

That being said, a significant question still remains regarding what al-Rāzī really meant by the denial of an essence in itself. Now I will try to answer this based on two premises. I will not, however, delve into their justification but merely clarify how I understand them:

- (1) Al-Rāzī represents a realist interpretation of Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence.
- (2) Al-Rāzī is of the view that essences are made (*maj'ūla*).

To begin with the first premise, al-Rāzī is known to have embraced a realist reception of the Avicennian essence–existence distinction, arguing against the conceptualist camp that essence and existence are extramentally distinct. As a rejector of mental existence, especially in his *Mulakhkhaṣ*,²¹ he seems to embrace the view that 'there are in the extramental world essences *qua* essences in a neutral ontological state, which have their own identity and are primary to existence'.²² He also hesitantly suggests that these extramentally real essences may subsist by themselves or inhere in a hidden body as a Platonic form.²³ Although this does not necessarily mean that he subscribed to the

²⁰ Ibid.; al-Rāzī, *Lawāmi'*, 94. For a parallel argument, see al-Dawānī, 'Fī kalimat al-tawhīd', 138.

²¹ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Mulakhkhaṣ fī al-mantiq wa-l-ḥikma*, ed. İsmail Hanoğlu (Amman: al-Aṣḥayn li-Dirāsāt wa-l-Naṣr, 2021), 1:297–98; Heidrun Eichner, 'Essence and Existence: Thirteenth-Century Perspectives in Arabic-Islamic Philosophy and Theology', in *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics*, ed. Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 119–22.

²² Fedor Benevich, 'The Essence-Existence Distinction: Four Elements of the Post-Avicennian Metaphysical Dispute (11–13th Centuries)', *Oriens* 45, no. 3–4 (2017): 249.

²³ al-Rāzī, *Mulakhkhaṣ*, 298.

doctrine of Platonic forms, as Benevich rightly warns,²⁴ it suffices for our purposes to say that he seems to ascribe essences a kind of reality.

The second premise brings us to another long-running debate of post-classical Islamic philosophy, that is, the problem of the making of essences (*jaʿl al-māhiyyāt*). I will start with the semantics of the verb *j-ʿl*. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (*fl.* the first quarter of the eleventh century) enumerates five distinct senses of the verb, of which the second and fourth matter most to us. According to the second, the verb has the same meaning as *awjada*, that is, '[He] created' or 'brought into existence'. Used this way, the verb is transitive and needs one object. In the fourth form, however, it means 'to change something from one state to another', and takes two objects.²⁵ *Jaʿl* seems to have been usually taken by scholars, including al-Kūrānī himself as will be seen below, in the fourth sense, but I argue that al-Rāzī was using it in the second sense to mean the creation of essences,²⁶ not in the sense of bestowing them existence. Such a distinction was possible for al-Rāzī as a proponent of the realist reading of the essence–existence distinction. This is because if it is the case that essences have a certain kind of extramental reality and identity before they exist, then they are subject to creation; they are created as essences before being made existent:²⁷ 'The Omnipotent, just as He makes the essence existent, makes also the essence an essence.'²⁸ That is to say, if an essence has not been made by the Omnipotent in the first place, it is not possible yet to talk about whether it is existent or instantiated in the external world.²⁹

Also relevant is al-Rāzī's treatment of impossible essences, which pose some peculiar problems to his realism about essences due to the fact that they cannot subsist in themselves or inhere in hidden bodies, as Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. ca. 663/1265) reminds us.³⁰ For al-Rāzī, impossible objects of thought, such as a second god (*sharīk al-bārī*),

24 Fedor Benevich, 'The Reality of the Non-Existent Object of Thought', *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 6 (2018): 45.

25 al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *J-ʿl*, in *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qurʾān*, ed. Ṣafwān ʿA. al-Dāwūdī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1991).

26 This clarification is made by the sixteenth-century Ottoman scholar Kamālpashazāda, who himself held the position that essences are made in the second sense of the verb *j-ʿl*: 'Risāla fī bayān maʿnā al-jaʿl wa-tahqīq anna al-māhiyya majʿūla', in *Majmūʿ rasāʾil al-ʿAllāma Ibn Kamāl Bāshā*, ed. Ḥamza Bakrī et al., vol. 6 (Istanbul: Dār al-Lubāb, 2018), esp. 290.

27 Indeed, this interpretation of the Rāzīan position is supported by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's objection against him. See Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Nuʿmān, 1992), 3:34. For the translation and discussion of the related passage, see Benevich, 'The Essence-Existence Distinction', 246–47.

28 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyya, 1986), 1:99.

29 Pace Ibrahim, who says '*jaʿl* is introduced independently of the question of God as the Creator of essences and independently of the temporal origination of essences'. Bilal Ibrahim, 'Causing an Essence: Notes on the Concept of *Jaʿl al-Māhiyya*, from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī to Mullā Ṣadrā', in *Philosophical Theology in Islam: Later Ashʿarism East and West*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh and Jan Thiele (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 156.

30 See Benevich, 'The Reality of the Non-Existent Object of Thought', 50.

cannot be said to be objects (*dhawāt*), realities (*ḥaqāʾiq*), or essences (*māhiyyāt*).³¹ This is where we find the key to understanding what he meant by the negation of essences. If an essence has not been created by God, it is said to be nothing at all, and in this sense it is denied. In the case of the alleged essence of a second god, it is not possible to talk about such an essence (except as being a combination of some real essences) because it is impossible. Therefore, al-Rāzī seems to mean above that the *Kalima* as it is signifies that there is no such essence as the second deity because it is not created by God due to its being impossible. Notably, in this interpretation, just like *jaʿl*, the term ‘to deny’ (*naḥy*) is construed as a transitive verb with a singular object, specifically ‘to deny something’, rather than a dual-object structure such as ‘to negate something of something’.³²

1.2 The Restitutionist Reading

When we turn to the other, restitutionist, reading of the *Kalima*, we see al-Kūrānī strive both to show the accuracy of his own reading and to respond to al-Rāzī’s arguments, countering them first on the linguistic level. He introduces his deep disagreement with al-Rāzī by asserting that the original form of the *Kalima* was a nominal sentence, that is, ‘God is a deity’ (*Allāhu ilāhun*), but as a result of a series of operations carried out for the sake of restricting (*qaṣr*) divinity to God alone, it evolved into its current form, namely, an exceptive sentence (*istithnā*). Its predicate meanwhile has been brought forward and its subject has been pushed back: *ilāhun Allāhu*. Afterwards, the *lā* of general denial has been attached to the very beginning of the sentence to govern the initial predicate while the subject has been put in the scope of the *illā* of exception, called the ‘excepted’ (*al-mustathnā*). Thus we obtain *Lā ilāha illā Allāh*.³³ Notice, however, in the new structure of the *Kalima*, the word *ilāha* seems to occupy the place of the subject, which is called now the noun of the *lā*, but there is a missing essential element in the sentence, namely, the predicate of the *lā*. According to al-Kūrānī, the predicate of the *lā* must be implied if it does not occur in the literal structure; an exceptive sentence with the *lā* must be a complete sentence either explicitly or implicitly.

In proving this, he resorts to two grammatical arguments, the first based on the linguistic convention that Arabic speakers use the particle *lā* with a noun and a predicate, which shows that it only attaches to complete nominal sentences. The predicate might

31 al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, 1:95. For more on his treatment of such objects of thought, see Benevich, ‘The Reality of the Non-Existent Object of Thought’, 50ff.

32 On different meanings and usages of the verb *n-ḥy*, see Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn Manẓūr, ‘*n-ḥy*’, in *Lisān al-Arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1993).

33 For details of these complicated grammatical operations, see al-Kūrānī, ‘Inbāh’, 165–75. The part of the exceptive sentence before *illā* is called the ‘antecedent’ (*al-mustathnā minḥ*) and the part after it the ‘excepted’ (*al-mustathnā*). See Elsaid Badawi, Michael G. Carter, and Adrian Gully, *Modern Written Arabic: A Comprehensive Grammar*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2016), chap. 9.

be implicit, if ordinarily understood from the context, but it is still there.¹ For al-Kūrānī, such a convention is decisive due to the fact that the usage of Arabic speakers is the final authority in linguistic conflicts.²

The second argument is that particles (*hurūf*) have no independent meaning of their own: they have meaning only by means of the nouns and verbs they are related to. If a particle is such that it can only have a complete meaning by means of two things, such as the *lā* of general denial, then these two things must be present either explicitly in the sentence's surface structure or implicitly in its underlying form. Otherwise, the meaning of the particle could not be realised.³ In other words, the negation expressed by the *lā* always requires two elements: a negated meaning (*manfī*) and that of which it is denied (*manfī 'anh*), the non-existence of either drastically harming the meaning of the *Kalima*'s negation.⁴

Alongside these grammatical and semantical arguments, al-Kūrānī has also logical and philosophical ones against the Rāzian view that denial can concern only one element, namely, the essence signified by the noun after the *lā*. In this context, he refers to one of the most prominent figures in post-classical Islamic thought, al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), quoting at length al-Jurjānī's comments on Abū Ya'qūb al-Sakkākī's (d. 626/1229) statement that 'The denial of essences themselves (*anfus al-dhawāt*) is impossible; only their attributes can be denied. The proof for this is sought in other sciences.'⁵ After expounding different meanings of *dhāt*, al-Jurjānī proceeds to the most probable one in this context, according to which *dhāt* is that which is independent in terms of conceivability (*mafḥūmiyya*), that is, capable of being conceived and considered on its own. Defining *dhāt*, al-Jurjānī adds, as 'that which can be known' points to the same meaning. In this case, the term 'attribute' (*ṣifa*) will mean 'that which is not independent in terms of conception', that is, something which can only be a mirror (*mir'ā*) for the consideration of another concept, as al-Jurjānī puts it. The relation of judgement (*al-nisba al-ḥukmiyya*) between the subject and predicate is also an attribute in this sense. That is, it is not a *dhāt* and it is this relation that is subjected to negation and affirmation. Al-Jurjānī explicates the distinction at stake between an essence⁶ and attribute as follows:

[t4] [a] When you conceive of, for example, 'Zayd', 'man', or 'blackness', but do not conceive of anything else alongside it, you will be able to carry out neither negation nor affirmation. Even if you conceive of 'existence' or 'subsistence in the other',

1 al-Kūrānī, 'Inbāḥ', 93.

2 Ibid., 157.

3 Ibid., 77.

4 Ibid., 233.

5 Abū Ya'qūb al-Sakkākī, *Miftāḥ al-'ulūm*, ed. Nu'aym Zarzūr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987), 290, see also 309.

6 In al-Sakkākī and al-Jurjānī, we are faced with somewhat different terminology in that they use *dhāt* instead of *māhiyya*, which we saw above used by al-Rāzī, but considering the definition of *dhāt* by al-Jurjānī, I can sense no substantial difference between these terms. Hence, I use 'essence' for both.

but do not attend to a relation between these two [sets of concepts], no negation or affirmation will be possible, either. [b] When you attend to this [relation], you [b1] either consider it for itself (*bi-l-dhāt*) insofar as it is a relation of existence or subsistence to one of them; even then you do not deny or affirm it. Granted, you could then posit it as a subject or predicate so as to say ‘The relation of existence to Zayd obtains’ or ‘This relation is the relation of existence to Zayd’. Or [b2] you consider it as a means (*ālatan*) to consider these two parts [i.e. the subject and predicate], regarding it as being posited between them. It is only then that it becomes possible for you to deny or affirm it. Thus, it is evident that the judgement of negation or affirmation cannot attach to essences. Rather, these [judgements] can only attach to attributes that are relations of judgements [in this context] insofar as they are regarded as being between the parts of those [relations] and as a means to find out their properties.⁷

Al-Jurjānī here meticulously differentiates between three possible cases to identify the real object of affirmation and negation. In the first case (a), one considers different concepts, which are potentially either subjects or predicates, but one has not yet established any relation of judgement between them; they stand, as it were, apart from each other in one’s mind. In the second case (b1), one makes a relation of judgement between the terms and considers, for example, Zayd’s being existent, provided that one considers this relation, however, as an independent entity in itself, a *dhāt* in al-Jurjānī’s terminology. In these two cases, however, there is still no affirmation or negation. Finally, in the case of b2, there occurs affirmation or negation because it is in this case that one relates the predicate to the subject, but this time conceiving of the relation not as something in itself but as something *about* other things. The relation of judgement, in this case, appears to belong to a meta-level or to be a second-order concept, which is *about* its two *relata* belonging to the first order. Al-Jurjānī expresses the relation’s being a second-order concept by his famous metaphor of the mirror, according to which a mirror can be seen from two different perspectives: as something in itself or as a means of assessing other things reflected in it. Someone who looks at a mirror, al-Jurjānī says, can take it as a means and focus his attention on the form reflected in the mirror to make judgements about it or learn more about its properties. In this case, no judgement will be made about the mirror itself. But if one instead focuses on the mirror itself, considering it on its own, then one can learn about it and its properties, such as its substance and brightness.⁸ Thus, I conclude, in the case of b2, the relation of judgement is only taken for the sake of its *relata*, not in itself

7 al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Hāshiya ‘alā al-Muṭawwal* (Istanbul: Şahāfiya-i ‘Uthmāniya, 1891), 231. For al-Kūrānī’s quotation, see ‘Inbāh’, 73–75.

8 al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Hāshiya ‘alā Tasdīd al-qawā’id fī sharḥ Tajrīd al-aqā’id*, ed. Eşref Altaş et al. (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2020), 2:217–18. Al-Jurjānī has also a treatise on knowledge based on this metaphor, for the text of which, see *ibid.*, 218m.

at all, which makes it a second-order concept, or an attribute according to al-Jurjānī. As such, the relation can serve as the only object of affirmation and negation.

Based on these statements by al-Jurjānī, al-Kūrānī reaches the following conclusion: the negation signified by the *lā* does not relate to the noun it attaches to, but to the relation between the subject and the predicate, and given that a single concept could not be sufficient on its own to make a relation, there must be at least two *relata* to sensibly talk about a relation. In the absence of either *relatum*, the relation – and therefore both affirmation and negation – will also fail to obtain. Therefore, according to al-Kūrānī, it is obvious that when negation is bound to the subject, it is in fact bound to a relation that a predicate stands in to the subject, and when it is bound to the predicate, it is in fact bound to a relation that a subject bears to a predicate. In either case, if the predicate is not explicit, it must be assumed as implicit.⁹

Al-Kūrānī is also aware that the discussion bears heavily on the problem of *ja' l al-māhiyyāt* and resumes the discussion where al-Rāzī left off, namely, where he argued in t3 that every attempt of denial, even if it seems to deny a relation, ends up affecting an essence in itself. Al-Kūrānī seems to grant that but does not concede what al-Rāzī's argument appears to presuppose according to my interpretation above, that is, that essences are created by God in the first place (*ibtidā'an*) qua essences ready to be given existence, and an essence is said to be denied if not created by God. In other words, the crux of his disagreement with al-Rāzī is whether the essence qua essence is created or not. For al-Kūrānī, it is not in itself an object of temporal origination or negation; its *ja' l* amounts to nothing but its being given existence whereas its *naḥy* amounts to its being shorn of it.¹⁰

Al-Kūrānī raises several arguments for the uncreatedness of essences, but I will limit my treatment here to one that reflects his Akbarian tendencies:¹¹

[t5] Verification [provides the conclusion] that the essences of all possible things in terms of their presence in God's eternal self-knowledge are definitely eternal and uncreated because everything created must be known to the creator before creation, and everything known must have some sort of presence in the knowledge of the knower due to that knowledge's being the relation between the known and its knower. This relation can obtain only with two *relata*, which are necessarily distinct from each other in some way, and there can only be distinctness if each *relatum* has some sort of presence... Therefore, everything known has a kind of presence in God's eternal self-knowledge and this presence is eternal and uncreated.¹²

9 al-Kūrānī, 'Inbāh', 75–76, 79.

10 Ibid., 79–80.

11 For al-Kūrānī's Akbarianism, see Alexander Knysh, 'Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d. 1101/1690), an Apologist for Waḥdat al-Wujūd', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 5, no. 1 (1995): 39–47; Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life in the Hijāz*, chap. 5.

12 al-Kūrānī, 'Inbāh', 80–81.

In the dense argument here, we find significant hints of an Akbarian background for his adamant rejection of the *ja'l* theory. Above all, al-Kūrānī's recognition of possible essences as eternal objects of God's eternal self-knowledge reveals its unmistakably Akbarian roots.¹³ However, he afterwards adopts a more orthodox approach to prove this view, more orthodox because it is based on the view of knowledge as relation that is also embraced by al-Rāzī.¹⁴ If knowledge is the relation between the knower and the known, then every object of knowledge must have a kind of distinctness and therefore some sort of presence, given that there can be no distinction among pure non-existents. From these premises, al-Kūrānī deduces that non-existent essences of possible things are eternally present (*thābita*) in God's self-knowledge. If they are eternal, he reaches the conclusion he seeks: they are not subject to *ja'l* or *nafy*, to being created or not being created.¹⁵

Now that we have seen the arguments from both sides, a brief assessment is in order. The bone of contention here is logico-philosophical rather than linguistic. This is because al-Rāzī, on the one hand, seems to have argued that denial, *nafy*, is first and foremost, so to speak, a one-place predicate, that is, 'S is denied', but he never rejects its usage as a two-place predicate, 'P is negated of S'. Particularly, in his *Nihāyat al-ijāz*, he is unmistakably clear that both affirmation and negation require two elements to be meaningful.¹⁶ However, his point is that its usage as a one-place predicate is primary while the other is reducible to it; in 'S is not P', what is denied is the relation R between them.

Al-Kūrānī, on the other hand, emphasises *nafy* as a two-place predicate, but he seems somewhat unable to satisfactorily refute al-Rāzī's arguments showing its reducibility and therefore appears to have finally granted it, even if grudgingly. Yet his main concern was not grammatical or logical, but theological; he was resisting the theological consequences of al-Rāzī's argument, that is, the createdness of essences. Although he agrees with al-Rāzī in principle that there are non-existent essences, he differs with him in details; for al-Rāzī, these essences are created by God as essences ready to be brought into existence, but for al-Kūrānī, they are eternally present in God's eternal self-knowledge. Al-Kūrānī rejects the creation of essences as this would lead to the unacceptable outcome, in his view, that the content of God's eternal knowledge is not eternal but created.

13 On Ibn al-ʿArabī's own view that the objects of God's knowledge are synonymous with non-existent essences of possible things, that is, on the so-called theory of immutable entities (*al-a'yān al-thābita*), see e.g. William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 11–12, 83–85.

14 On this, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maʿālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqa (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987), 3:103–4.

15 al-Kūrānī, 'Inbāh', 87–88. Al-Kūrānī also has a treatise devoted to the explication of his view that non-existent essences are present in God's knowledge, which was edited in M. Bilal Gültekin, 'İbrahim Kūrānī'nin "Cilāu'l-Fuhūm fī Tahkiki's-Sübūt ve Ru'yeti'l-Madūm" Adlı Risalesinin Tahkikli Neşri', *Tahkik İslami İlmler Araştırma ve Neşir Dergisi* 4, no. 2 (2021): 55–147.

16 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-ijāz fī dirāyat al-ijāz*, ed. Nasrullah Hacımüftüoğlu (Beirut: Dār Şādīr, 2004), 75.

In sum, al-Rāzī maintains that the *Kalima* is a complete verbal sentence that perfectly signifies the negation of a second deity, but for al-Kūrānī, it is a nominal sentence in need of an additional predicate because negating the essence signified by the noun after the *lā* is impossible for logical as well as grammatical reasons; it is only the relation between the subject and predicate that is negated or affirmed. What predicate is implied in the *Kalima* according to al-Kūrānī? As I explained above, the original form of the *Kalima* is *Allāhu ilāhun*, but in order to restrict the predicate to the subject, it was changed to *Lā ilāha illā Allāh*, in which *ilāh* becomes the new subject. In Arabic, there are two kinds of subject: nominal or adjectival.¹⁷ Therefore, we can take the subject (*ilāh*) of the current structure of the *Kalima* either as a noun or as an adjective in the sense of ‘worshipped’ (*ma’lūh*). In the former case, that which is excepted by the *illā*, that is, *Allāhu*, is in the nominative case (*marfūʿ*) because it is in apposition to the subject, *ilāh*, when it is not yet under the governance of the *lā*, and the implied predicate is ‘in existence’ or the like. In the latter case, on the other hand, when the subject is an adjective, that which is excepted becomes the agent of the verb, which is implicit in *ilāh*, and renders any predicate redundant. On the former reading, the *Kalima* means that ‘No deity exists save God’, but on the latter, ‘No one is a deity save God’. Although the former is the prevalent position, al-Kūrānī prefers the latter due to several advantages it enjoys over the former.¹⁸ Below, we will examine the propositions he deduces from the *Kalima* according to this reading.

2. The Proposition(s) in the *Kalima*

The question of the nature and number of propositions the *Kalima* contains is closely related to discussions about the principle that the exception to negation is tantamount to an affirmation and vice versa (*al-istithnāʾ min al-naḡy ithbātun wa-bi-l-ʾaks*). For there is an obvious negation in the *Kalima*, signified by the *lā*, but whether it also contains an affirmation is a matter of controversy. Those who see the negation alone, but no affirmation alongside, maintain that it contains only one judgement and therefore one proposition. I will call this approach *the monadic reading* of the *Kalima*. On the other hand, those who subscribe to the principle that the exception to negation is tantamount to an affirmation defend the existence of two judgements and thus two propositions, one being negative and the other affirmative. I will call this approach *the dyadic reading*. The former is held by al-Rāzī while al-Kūrānī emphatically places himself in the opposite camp yet again.

17 On this, see e.g. Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī al-Ushmūnī, *Manhaj al-sālik ilā Alfyyat Ibn Mālik* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1998), 1:88ff.; Faḍīl Šāliḥ al-Sāmarrāʾī, *Maʿānī al-naḡw* (Amman: Dār al-Fikr, 2000), 1:66–67.

18 See al-Kūrānī, ‘Inbāḥ’, 176–77, 188–89, 191ff.; al-Māziq, ‘Ujālat dhawī al-intibāḥ’, 29–31.

2.1 The Monadic Reading

The representative of this interpretation, al-Rāzī, does not directly deal with the question of how many propositions there are, but examines at length the two issues that lie at the root of the question. The first of these is whether the *Kalima* is complete or not, and as seen above, al-Rāzī opted for the former alternative. To recap, the *Kalima* read as a complete verbal sentence means for him that any deity other than God is denied because, he explains, *Lā* means ‘is denied’ and *illā* ‘other than’, and hence the *Kalima* conclusively denies the essence of ‘any deity other than God’.¹⁹

The second relevant issue, which will occupy us in this section, is whether the exception to negation gives us an affirmation. In other words, does any sentence, like the *Kalima*, that includes both a negation and an exception to it make only one or two judgements, a negative one in the antecedent of the sentence (*Lā ilāha*) and an affirmative one in the exceptive part (*illā Allāh*)? That is, does the exceptive part make an independent judgement in the opposite quality to that in the antecedent, or does it only negate the judgement of the antecedent, making no independent judgement? We see that this problem has been intensely discussed especially in the works of Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) in such a way as to lead to the formation of two main camps: the Ḥanafī scholars of legal theory, who argue that neither does the exception to negation mean affirmation nor vice versa, and the majority, who hold the opposite position that both the exception to negation means affirmation and vice versa.²⁰ Let us extend the naming above to cover all exceptive sentences and call the former position the ‘monadic reading of exception’ and the latter the ‘dyadic reading of exception’.

Al-Rāzī seems to have assumed different stances on the issue in his different works, his most extensive treatment being in his *Lawāmī*.²¹ There al-Rāzī states, presumably referring to Ḥanafīs, that some scholars of Islamic legal theory (*ba’d al-uṣūliyyīn*) claimed that the exception to negation is not an affirmation. Their argument here could be reconstructed as follows. In the *Kalima*, for example, ‘There is no god save God’, there are two semantical elements in the antecedent, ‘There is no god’: the non-existence itself of any god and the judgement of that non-existence. The second part, ‘save God’, therefore, either constitutes an exception to the non-existence itself or the speaker’s judgement of non-existence. The

19 Al-Dawānī reiterates the same idea, but he is clearer that *lā* means ‘is denied’: ‘Fī kalimat al-tawḥīd’, 138; see also al-Kūrānī, ‘Inbāḥ’, 283–84.

20 On the details of the debate, see e.g. Sayf al-Dīn ‘Alī al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, ed. ‘Abd al-Razzāq ‘Afīfī (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṣamī‘ī, 2003), 2:378; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Bannānī, *Ḥāshiyat al-‘Allāma al-Bannānī ‘alā sharḥ al-Jalāl ‘alā Jam‘ al-jawāmī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1982), 2:13–16; ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī, *Kashf al-asrār ‘an Uṣūl Fakhṛ al-Islām al-Bazdawī*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh M. M. ‘Umar (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997), 3:187–98; Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Tabwīḥ ‘alā sharḥ al-Tawḥīd li-matn al-Tanqīḥ* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya al-Kubrā, 1909), 2:20–28.

21 A shorter version of the argument occurs also in his *Tafsīr*, 5:435–36. However, in his work on legal theory, *Maḥṣūl*, al-Rāzī this time features a short argument in the opposite direction, that is, for the view that the exception to negation is affirmation: *al-Maḥṣūl fī ‘ilm uṣūl al-fiqh*, ed. Ṭahā J. F. al-‘Alwānī (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1992), 3:39.

latter case would not imply that there is an affirmation in the exceptive part of the sentence because the exceptive particle removes the judgement of non-existence, without making an affirmative judgement instead. In other words, the excepted element – God in this sentence – remains unspoken of (*maskūt ‘anh*) in this case, with no judgement, whether negative or affirmative, made of it. In the latter case, however, that is, if the exception is related to the non-existence itself to remove it, then there would be an affirmative judgement of God in the excepted part because there is no intermediate value between the two contradictories, that is, between affirmation and negation.²²

In other words, the negative antecedent of the exceptive sentence can be interpreted in two ways: it can refer to either the state of affairs in the extramental reality or the mental judgement formed by the speaker when uttering this sentence. Depending on whether the former or the latter option is chosen, the exceptive particle *illā* will exclude one of these things. If the exceptive particle denies and eliminates the former, then there obtains the affirmative judgement that God exists. This is because any judgement that negates non-existence must affirm existence, given that there is no intermediary. Nonetheless, if the particle *illā* is taken to eliminate the mental judgement of the speaker then no judgement would obtain: the elimination of judgement amounts to the non-existence of any judgement, affirmative or negative. In this case, no judgement would be passed about the excepted element, God.

Afterwards, al-Rāzī turns to elucidating his own position that the exception should relate to the judgement of non-existence rather than non-existence itself and tries to justify it with the following two arguments:

[t6] First, expressions (*al-alfāz*) have been invented to signify mental judgements, not external existents, because when you say, ‘The world is pre-eternal,’ it does not indicate that the world is really pre-eternal in itself. Otherwise, when we say, ‘The world is pre-eternal, and the world is originated,’ the world would have to be both pre-eternal and originated at the same time, which is impossible. Rather, this statement indicates your judgement that the world is pre-eternal. Thus, it has become clear that the expressions have been posited to signify mental judgements, not external individuals. If this is the case, taking the exception as pertaining to the judgement of non-existence is more fitting than to the non-existence itself due to the fact that the closer referent of the expression is the mental judgement. The external being, on the other hand, is the referent of the mind. Taking the utterance according to its near referent is better than taking it according to its distant referent. Secondly, something’s non-existence or existence in itself is not subject to someone else’s (*al-ghayr*) agency. Rather, it is the judgement regarding this non-existence or

22 al-Rāzī, *Lawāmiʿ*, 95.

existence that is subject to the speaker's (*al-qā'il*) agency. Given that is the case, it has been established that relating the exception to the judgement is more appropriate than relating it to the predicate (*al-maḥkūm bih*).²³

Presumably departing from Aristotle's well-known semiotic triangle between language and thinking, on the one hand, and thinking and reality, on the other (*De Int.* 16a4–9), which was widely embraced by Arabic logicians as well,²⁴ al-Rāzī seems to have reached here a mediated reference theory.²⁵ For him, a linguistic expression has to follow an indirect route to reach its final destination, its extramental referent; there is a significant stop on the way, which is the mental content. Such an expression first and immediately signifies the mental representation which in turn refers to the real objects. To assume otherwise, al-Rāzī argues rather controversially, would lead to the impossible consequence that the world would be pre-eternal and originated at the same time, were a sentence to say so. If this is the case, then an affirmative sentence, for example, should be thought of as standing first for its mental counterpart such that its negation also would eliminate that mental affirmative judgement. This view will have the consequence in our case that the exceptive particle in the *Kalima* affects the negative judgement in the antecedent of the sentence and indicates that it does not apply to the excepted.

Before moving on, let us briefly touch upon what I see as the Achilles heel of al-Rāzī's argument. Would the argument for direct reference of linguistic expressions to their referents necessarily amount to saying that the referent really exists or obtains? More clearly, if I say that 'Zayd is standing' makes direct reference to external reality, would this mean that necessarily Zayd is standing? According to al-Taftāzānī, no, because the relation between the sentence and its external referent is, though direct, a conventional one (*waḍ'ī*), always liable to truth and falsity; it never guarantees its own truth, the referent's obtaining. In other words, upon hearing, for example, 'Zayd left the room', one understands that he left the room, but always keeps in mind the possibility that he did not, in which case the sentence would be false.²⁶

23 Ibid., 95–96. The words *al-ghayr* and *al-qā'il* in the text read *al-'ayn* and *al-qābil*, respectively, in the published edition of the work, but as such, they hardly make any sense. In my research through the manuscript copies, I have found that my reading above is more faithful to these copies. See e.g. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmi' al-bayyināt fī sharḥ al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt* (MS Istanbul: Süleymaniye Manuscript Library, Ragıp Paşa 664), fols. 35b6–7. This copy is significant in that it carries a colophon by the scholar and prolific author Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201/1786), which makes it almost certain that it was handwritten in al-Rāzī's lifetime. On the same issue, see also Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, ed. 'Alī Riḍā Najafzāda (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tehran, 1964), 1:21.

24 See e.g. F. W. Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione* (London: British Academy, 1991), 10 ff.; Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā': al-'Ibāra*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Khuḍayrī (Cairo: al-Hay'ā al-Miṣriyya al-'Amma li-l-Ta'lif wa-l-Nashr, 1970), chap. I.1.

25 On mediated reference theory, see e.g. Robert J. Stainton, *Philosophical Perspectives on Language* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1996), chap. 4.

26 Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *al-Muṭawwal sharḥ Talkhīṣ Mifṭāḥ al-'ulūm* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya,

In the second argument, al-Rāzī emphasises another difference between the judgement and its external counterpart, that is, the judgement of non-existence and non-existence itself. For him, unlike the former, the latter is independent of any agent's mental consideration. When one utters, for example, the *Kalima* to exclude God from the scope of the antecedent, his mental effort in the exception should be aimed at the judgement in the antecedent, which is open to one's agency, and not at the non-existence itself, which is not open to it. Therefore, according to al-Rāzī, the exception of the *illā* governs the judgement that any deity is denied, instead of the negation, which is the predicate of this judgement. And if the exception attaches to the judgement of negation, then the *Kalima* includes only one proposition. In a nutshell, in forming a sentence, the speaker is the agent of the judgement in her mind, having power over it alone, and not over external reality, as is also pointed out by al-Rāzī's younger contemporary, al-Sakkākī, when he describes the utterer of a declarative sentence (*khavar*) as 'the agent of the judgement'.²⁷

Incidentally, al-Rāzī resorts in his *Maḥṣūl* to a similar argument for the same conclusion, but here he argues that otherwise, that is, if the signification of a sentence was not the mental judgement, then 'the false [sentence] would not be declarative',²⁸ which is nonsense. This is because if what is meant by a declarative sentence was extramental reality, then false sentences could not count as declarative, the reason being that they do not have any external correspondence. I will return to this point when I discuss al-Kūrānī's position on the issue.

Setting aside the question of whether these arguments are strong enough to prove al-Rāzī's monadic position, I would like to note here his apparent inconsistency. As discussed above, al-Rāzī was of the view that the *illā* in the *Kalima* has the same meaning as *ghayr*, that is, an adjective meaning 'otherness'. Moreover, he argues that the *illā* should not be taken to denote exception.²⁹ That is to say, the combination of this *illā* and the noun after it constitutes a part of the subject of the *Kalima*, which is 'any deity other than God' as a whole. Taken this way, there would be no exception in the *Kalima* and no need at all to discuss what element it affects. Hence, there seems to be an apparent inconsistency between the two interpretations of the *illā* by al-Rāzī. However, another option might be that these arguments are only hypothetical, that is, if the *illā* were to be taken as exceptive, and he makes them only in order to show that even if this were the case, there would be a defensible way to maintain the dyadic reading. Even if the *illā* denoted exception, there would be no second judgement after it due to the fact that the exception affects the judgement of negation itself, which is to say, the *Kalima* includes only a single proposition. This seems to me a promising way to explain away al-Rāzī's apparent inconsistency.

2013), 181.

27 al-Sakkākī, *Miftāḥ al-'ulūm*, 166.

28 al-Rāzī, *Maḥṣūl*, 4:223–24.

29 al-Rāzī, *Lawāmi'*, 95.

Nevertheless, if there is only one negative proposition in the *Kalima* to the effect that any other god besides God is denied, will the *Kalima* still express God's existence? This question brings us to one of the most intriguing aspects of al-Rāzī's discussion of the *Kalima* because for him it has nothing to say about God's existence: 'Our statement *Lā ilāha illā Allāh* is a declaration (*taṣrīḥ*) of the denial of other deities, but it is not the recognition of the existence of God.'³⁰ Al-Rāzī is, of course, aware of the potential objection that the articulation of the *Kalima* does not suffice to make one Muslim because negating other deities would not commit one to God's existence. He seems to acknowledge this objection to be right but tries to diminish the severity of the situation. For one thing, what is at stake in the *Kalima* is not God's existence because everyone around the Prophet already believed in His existence. The issue was that they recognised some other deities alongside Him, and the *Kalima* is a rejection of this polytheistic approach. Second, although it does not signify God's existence in terms of linguistic convention (*al-waḍʿ al-lughawī*), it does so in terms of religious convention (*al-waḍʿ al-sharʿī*).³¹ That is to say, Muslims came to the consensus that its meaning includes affirming God's existence.

It seems, therefore, that ironically enough, on his way to prove that the *Kalima* expresses a complete unification of God, al-Rāzī has at the end of the day reduced it to a statement that rejects only polytheism and that is devoid of even signifying the existence of God. Understandably, this would be a position that al-Kūrānī could not be content with. Let us now turn to al-Kūrānī's dyadic reading of the *Kalima*.

2.2 The Dyadic Reading

To resume the discussion from where al-Rāzī left off, I would like to state that al-Kūrānī rejects, at some length and without mentioning his name, al-Rāzī's view that the *Kalima* signifies God's existence only due to religious convention. However, I will not linger on the details of his counter-arguments as they are mostly based on religious and historical traditions,³² which are beyond the scope of the paper. I will therefore move to discuss al-Kūrānī's position on the debate between the monadic and dyadic readings of exception sentences.

Al-Kūrānī devotes the fourth chapter of his *Inbāh* to the debate, implying his position with the very title of the chapter: 'on the fact that the exception to negation means an affirmation and vice versa'. He begins the chapter with the arguments for the two sides of the debate, first giving those of the monadic reading. He emphasises two arguments in this context, the first being that the leading Arab philologists (*aʿimmat al-lugha*) have

³⁰ Ibid., 96.

³¹ Ibid., 97.

³² al-Kūrānī, 'Inbāh', 127–28. Al-Kūrānī's account seems to have heavily depended on Ibn al-Ḥāḥib and 'Aḥud al-Dīn al-ʿIjī. See 'Aḥud al-Dīn al-ʿIjī, *Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-Muntahā al-uṣūlī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004), 3:50.

reached the consensus that the exception to negation is affirmation and vice versa, and their views are authoritative in the discussions about the signification of linguistic expressions. The second argument refers to the meaning of the *Kalima*, positing that if the monadic reading of exception were granted, then the *Kalima* would only mean the negation of other deities without affirming God's existence. According to the supporters of the dyadic reading, the consequent of this hypothetical proposition is false, and therefore so is the antecedent. Thereafter al-Kūrānī proceeds to the counter-arguments. They answer the first argument by saying that the philologists' view of the subject builds on a metaphor: they are expressing the non-existence of the judgement of affirmation by the judgement of non-existence (on which more below). Against the second argument above, they state that the *Kalima* affirms God's existence, but this is only in terms of religious, not linguistic, convention.³³

From the previous section above, we are familiar with the part of the arguments and answers thereto that are related to the *Kalima*'s signification. So, I would like to focus, before dealing with al-Kūrānī's own treatment of the problem, on the ascription of metaphorical expression to the philologists by the exponents of the monadic reading, according to whom a sentence like the *Kalima* makes a negative judgement in the antecedent but does not assert anything about the excepted, God; He is not spoken of at all. That is, no judgement is passed on the exceptive part of the sentence, which is what they mean by 'the non-existence of judgement'. However, for them, philologists express this non-existence of judgement by the judgement of non-existence, or more clearly, the judgement that the predicate is non-existent for the subject of the exceptive part, God.³⁴

When he commences voicing his own perspective, al-Kūrānī reiterates the paradigm argument of the dyadic camp: affirmation and negation are contradictory judgements, and therefore they cannot both be true or false of the same subject at the same time. Otherwise, something excluded from, or prevented to enter in,³⁵ either of the two judgements would necessarily be included in the scope of the other, and two contradictories would be both false (*irtifā' al-naqīḍayn*), which is impossible.³⁶ However, as we saw in t6, this argument is far from persuasive to the monadic reader because arguably there would be no contradiction if there were no judgement.

Indeed, he concedes such a third option, that is, the subject's being completely neglected with no judgement about it at all, which would not count as a violation of the

33 al-Kūrānī, 'Inbāh', 116.

34 Al-Taftāzānī seems to have given some credit to this interpretation of the monadic reading in the case where the antecedent of the exceptive sentence is affirmative, but he regards it as rejecting necessary knowledge in the case of negative antecedents: 'Hāshiya 'alā sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-Muntahā al-uṣūlī', in *Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-Muntahā al-uṣūlī*, 3:50–51.

35 These two alternatives are due to different definitions of exception, the first as 'exclusion' (*al-ikhrāj*) by most scholars, e.g. Ibn al-Ḥājjib, *al-Kāfiya* (Karachi: Maktabat al-Bushrā, 2008), 76, and the second as 'prevention' (*al-man'*) exclusively by Ṣadr al-Sharī'a al-Maḥbūbī. For the latter, see al-Taftāzānī, *Talwīḥ*, 2:20.

36 al-Kūrānī, 'Inbāh', 116–17.

principle of excluded middle. However, once the speaker has mentioned the name of the excepted element, for instance, God in the *Kalima*, this option will not be available anymore. By uttering the *illā* of exception, one makes the judgement that the excepted is excluded from, or prevented from being included in, the judgement in the antecedent, which means one has passed a judgement of it. Al-Kūrānī deduces therefrom that the excepted could no longer be unspoken of or have a neutral status vis-à-vis negation or affirmation.³⁷

Al-Kūrānī comes up with a somewhat different formulation of the exceptive sentence, presumably as a counter-case against al-Rāzī's mediated reference theory. For al-Kūrānī, who seems to have embraced a kind of direct theory of reference or referentialism,³⁸ when one says, for example, 'I negate existence of gods, except of God,' the excepted part of this sentence could be thought of as devoid of any judgement because in this case the judgement would be realised between the speaker and the verb 'negate', the speaker being the agent of the verb. In that case, exception would mean the elimination of the speaker's judgement regarding the excepted part.³⁹ In this way, al-Kūrānī seems to argue that unless there is some clear indication in a sentence, such as the pronoun 'I', its signification cannot be limited to the mental judgement of the speaker, and it should rather be taken as an expression of external facts. Therefore, the utterer of the last sentence begins with the pronoun to point out that she is expressing her inner speculation. Nonetheless, this is not possible in, for example, 'There is no god save God', in which case the sentence is about the external situation, not the subjective judgement of the speaker.

To conclude this section, al-Rāzī's case for the monadic reading of exceptive sentences in general and of the *Kalima* in particular seems relatively more persuasive. Above all, he seems to have made an effective point when he avered that linguistic expressions primarily signify mental judgements and hence the exception made by the particle *illā* should be related to the judgement. Moreover, as al-Jurjānī also notes,⁴⁰ he was also right to claim that it is this judgement that is open to the agency of the speaker; one passes a judgement in the antecedent of the exceptive sentence and, purposing to make an exception, one should, or rather could only, turn to the judgement one has already made, not things in themselves, which are beyond the agency of the speaker. On the other hand, al-Kūrānī's counter-argument based on the law of the excluded middle seems to have failed to hit the mark because if there is no judgement concerning the subject of the exceptive part, there is no possibility for talking about a contradiction between the affirmative and negative judgements.

37 Ibid., 117.

38 On this, see Stainton, *Philosophical Perspectives*, chap. 3.

39 al-Kūrānī, 'Inbāh', 119–20.

40 al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Miftāḥ* (MS Istanbul: Süleymaniye Manuscript Library, Ragıp Paşa 1277), fols. 13b15–17.

I would like now to discuss as a final section the propositions that al-Kūrānī claims to be involved in the *Kalima*.

2.3 Al-Kūrānī's Propositions

As should be clear by this point, al-Kūrānī argues that two propositions are contained in the *Kalima*. According to his preferred reading – outlined above ('No one is a god, but God [is]') – one of them is a universal negative and the other a singular affirmative, but both are necessary. The first, that is, the universal negative, is 'Necessarily, no one is a god' while the singular affirmative is 'God is necessarily a god'. However, according to the prevalent interpretation, which reads the *Kalima* as 'No deity exists, but God', there would also be two necessary propositions: 'Necessarily, no deity exists' and 'God necessarily exists'. The exception on this reading, God, is in apposition to 'deity', which is taken as the subject of the sentence after the elements were swapped but before the subject comes under the governance of the *lā*.⁴¹ Notice here that the additional element on this reading ('exists') functions as the predicate of the *lā* and therefore of both propositions, but al-Kūrānī's interpretation supplies 'one' to serve as the subject of the universal proposition. Let us examine now his two propositions, beginning with the universal one.

2.3.1 *Necessarily, No One Is a God*

The subject of this proposition is 'one' after the sentence is made an exceptive sentence, and its predicate is the negative meaning in *ilāh* (*hiṣṣat al-naḥy min ilāh*). Al-Kūrānī means here that the noun of the *lā*, which is *ilāh*, refers to an essence qua essence, which is not affirmative or negative in itself but liable to become affirmative in an affirmative judgement and negative in a negative one. In other words, there is an affirmative, as well as a negative, meaning in the concept of *ilāh* because just as there are subjects or individuals that fall under the universal term *ilāh* such that it could be affirmed of them, there are others too, of which it could only be negated. Here in this negative proposition, the term *ilāh* is negated of any individuals that would not belong to its extension, namely, anything other than God.⁴² This explanation includes some hints as to how al-Kūrānī will ward off the doubt that there could be a contradiction between the universal and singular propositions of the *Kalima*, as will become clear shortly.

To explain the universality of the proposition, al-Kūrānī makes reference to the possibilities of Arabic grammar, according to which the *lā* of general denial expresses that the genus of the noun following it, if indefinite (*nakira*), includes all the individuals falling under it. Therefore, a sentence with *lā* clearly states that the noun that follows it is negated of all individuals because there is an agreement among Arab philologists that

⁴¹ al-Kūrānī, 'Inbāh', 282–83.

⁴² Ibid., 271.

it has the meaning of the *min* of generality (*istighrāq*).⁴³ It seems, therefore, that the *lā* of general denial and the genus name following it together are sufficient to form a universal negative proposition without the need for any additional universal-negative quantifiers.

It seems *prima facie* somewhat strange that al-Kūrānī deduced two necessary propositions from the *Kalima*, even though it contains no hint, let alone explicit mention, of necessity. Al-Kūrānī views the necessity of the unity of God as an evident fact in the light of rational as well as religious evidence. As for the necessity of these propositions, he accounts for it on linguistic grounds, stating that its explanation should be sought primarily in the character of nominal sentences. In this context, he refers again to al-Jurjānī, for whom the nominal sentence with a nominal predicate indicates the continuity (*al-istimrār*) of affirmation if it is affirmative and of negation if it is negative.⁴⁴ For al-Kūrānī, continuity is used in this context in a general sense to cover the impossibility, as well as the possibility, of the separation of the predicate from the subject. Therefore, it can mean that it is impossible for the predicate to be negated of the subject if the proposition is affirmative, and this is nothing, al-Kūrānī concludes, but what logicians (*ahl al-mizān*) call necessity (*al-darūra*).⁴⁵

2.3.2 God Is Necessarily a God

The subject of this singular affirmative proposition is 'God', which is in the position of the excepted under the governance of the particle *illā*. Now that we know why it is necessary, I would like to address here another problem of al-Kūrānī's account, namely, the apparent contradiction between the two propositions. The problem arises because the first proposition universally denies a predicate of a subject whereas the second confirms the same predicate of an individual falling under the same subject, given that 'God' can easily be put under the term 'one', the subject of the universal proposition. Let us now see how al-Kūrānī will overcome this alleged contradiction.

The potential of exceptive sentences to cause contradiction seems to have attracted the attention of Arabic philologists from early times. For example, in his commentary on al-Zamakhsharī's *Mufaṣṣal*, Ibn al-Ḥāḥib (d. 646/1249) feels the need to deal with an issue that seriously endangers the possibility of the exception made by the *illā* in general. For him, exceptive sentences first include the excepted in the scope of the element from which it is excepted (*al-mustathnā minh*) and then exclude it therefrom. In 'The people stood up, except Zayd', for example, the attribution of standing up to Zayd is necessary as he is a member of 'people', but the exceptive part denies it of him from the same re-

43 Ibid., 270. According to al-Zamakhsharī, if the indefinite noun after the *lā* of general denial is in the accusative case, the sentence certainly expresses generality (*istighrāq*): *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, ed. Khalīl M. Shihā, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 2009), 36. For al-Taftāzānī, on the other hand, any sentence with an overt or implicit *min* of generality necessarily signifies generality: *Tabwīḥ*, 1:55.

44 al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Miftāḥ*, fols. 95a5–7.

45 al-Kūrānī, 'Inbāḥ', 253–54.

spect, which might lead to the doubt that the two parts of the sentence are contradictory.

Ibn al-Ḥāḥib's solution to the problem is this: first, all the elements of the proposition, namely, the act of standing up, the people (of which Zayd is a member), and the exception of Zayd from these people, are fully conceivable. It is only after these elements are conceived that standing up is predicated of 'the people' from which Zayd has been excepted.⁴⁶ The commentator of Ibn al-Ḥāḥib's *Kāfiya*, Raḍī al-Dīn al-Astarābādī (d. after 688/1289), elaborates on this solution, saying that exception occurs entirely during the process of taking the subject-term such that the predicate is affirmatively or negatively attributed to the subject, which does not include the excepted any more. In other words, the whole of 'the people, except Zayd' constitutes the subject of the proposition. This is completely understandable because predication is a relation, and therefore, its *relata* have to be already existent before it obtains. Since one of these *relata* is the *mustathnā minh*, from which the excepted is excluded, it is inevitable that the excepted is both included in and excluded from it before the relational judgement is made. In this case, there will occur no contradiction.⁴⁷

In his *Inbāh*, al-Kūrānī cites al-Astarābādī's solution in a long quotation from al-Dawānī and finds this solution successful in overcoming the doubt of contradiction. According to him, in this way, the doubt can also be eliminated by noting that the genus before the *illā* (i.e. *ilāh* in the *Kalima*) would not include the excepted because, given the negative judgement that comes after the exception, the genus is open to both affirmative and negative attributions before the judgement is made. However, once the negative judgement is made, it no longer includes the excepted that has a positive relationship with this genus: God is an *ilāh*.⁴⁸

This would be a promising solution to the problem of contradiction if it does not otherwise cause trouble to al-Kūrānī. For when we take the subject of the universal proposition in the *Kalima* as the solution suggests, that is, as 'no god except God', and negate the predicate of it, there will remain only one proposition, making it considerably difficult to argue for the dyadic reading of the *Kalima*. This is because, as the reader may have already noticed, the subject taken so is no different at all from al-Rāzī's interpretation of it, and therefore, this is not just a matter of the number of propositions, but, more importantly, a matter of whether the *Kalima* is to signify the existence of God or not. Therefore, with this solution, al-Kūrānī may have found a satisfactory way out of the problem of contradiction, yet he seems to have risked his dyadic reading and more significantly the *Kalima*'s signification of God's existence. This is an unfortunate dilemma for him: he must either concede that the *Kalima* is self-contradictory or forfeit his dyadic

46 Ibn al-Ḥāḥib, *al-Īdāh fī sharḥ al-Mufaṣṣal*, ed. Mūsā B. al-'Alilī (Baghdad: Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1976), 1:359–60.

47 Raḍī al-Dīn al-Astarābādī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya*, ed. Yūsuf Ḥ. 'Umar (Benghazi: Manshūrāt Jāmi'at Qāryūnus, 1996), 2:77–78.

48 al-Kūrānī, 'Inbāh', 279.

reading. Perhaps it was this dilemma that compelled al-Rāzī to prefer the latter option considering that the former would leave us empty-handed.

3. Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined two interpretations of the *Kalima* held by al-Rāzī and by al-Kūrānī, respectively, which are hardly reconcilable. On the one hand, there is al-Rāzī's position that the *Kalima* is a *complete verbal* sentence that makes only one judgement, which is that the essence of any gods other than God is denied. For him, negating an essence qua essence is perfectly possible or rather inevitable. According to al-Kūrānī's interpretation, on the other hand, the *Kalima* is an *incomplete nominal* sentence having an implicit predicate that must be supplied by the reader, the reason being that negation is not possible unless there are two elements. Accordingly, the *Kalima* involves two judgements, one asserting that no one is a god while the other asserts that God is a god. Al-Kūrānī's position, however, seems to approach al-Rāzī's when the former tries to avoid the apparent problem of contradiction between these two propositions. He takes the subject-term of the universal proposition in such a way as to make the *Kalima* contain only one judgement. I conclude that al-Kūrānī seems to have faced a dilemma that would compel him either to give up his dyadic reading or to concede that the *Kalima* is self-contradictory.

More striking, however, is the way in which the propositional forms that Aristotelian logic does not recognise, such as exceptive and restrictive sentences, were treated within the body of linguistic or Islamic sciences. These discussions must be taken into account when drawing a complete picture of the tradition of 'Arabic' logic.

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Apophatic *Tawḥīd*: A Philosophical Account of Shīʿī Ismāʿīlī Theology

Khalil Andani

1. Introduction

The Ismāʿīlī Muslims are a minority branch of Shīʿī Islam, who recognise the religious authority of a line of hereditary Imāms from the *Ahl al-Bayt* of the Prophet Muḥammad. Unlike the majority Twelver Shīʿa, the Ismāʿīlīs trace the line of Imāms through the descendants of Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. after 138/755). Today the two largest Ismāʿīlī communities are the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs, who recognise the present Aga Khan (Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī) as their forty-ninth Imām, and the Dāʿūdī Bohras, who recognise a line of *dāʿīs* as the representatives of a hidden line of Imāms. Over the centuries, Ismāʿīlī Muslims under the guidance of their Imāms have developed distinctive legal, theological, and spiritual understandings of Islam that differ from Sunnīs and Twelver Shīʿa on key issues. The Ismāʿīlīs are famous for advocating an apophatic theology concerning the nature of God in which they negate all names, descriptions, and real predications from God. They also affirm a Neoplatonic understanding of divine cosmology in which God originates and sustains a vast hierarchy of cosmological realms comprising the intellectual, the spiritual, the subtle (imaginal), and physical worlds. In the Ismāʿīlī worldview, God issues a single eternal creative act—called the Command of God—which constitutes the first creation, known as the Universal Intellect—the eternal and most perfect creation of God. The Universal Intellect eternally emanates or generates the second creation, called the Universal Soul. The Soul is a spiritual substance in a perpetual state of spiritual motion as it strives to perfect itself; its spiritual movement produces the spiritual and physical worlds. The Universal Soul emanates numerous individual souls, including human souls, who are microcosms of the Universal Soul. The human souls who embody the spiritual perfections that reflect the Universal Intellect are the prophets and the Imāms, who have a cosmic mandate to guide other human beings to ontological perfection. Human souls may achieve perfection by submitting to the infallible guidance of the Imām of the time, whose pure soul receives continuous emanation and light from the Universal Intellect. In ascending towards perfection through following the guidance of the Imāms, human souls come to resemble and imitate the Universal Soul and Universal Intellect in spiritual virtues and perfections. This process of ‘integration’, by which the human soul is assimilated into its spiritual origin (*aṣl*), involves the act of *tawḥīd*, where the soul must divest and isolate every rank of God’s creation from divinity and thereby recognise the absolute unity of God.

All Muslim schools of thought were concerned about the best way to uphold the absolute unity of God, *tawhīd*, in both speech and practice. Most Sunnī theologians in the *kalām* tradition describe God through various divine names. They also affirm real-distinct entitative attributes (*ṣifāt maʿnawīyya*) for God—meaning that God has uncreated attributes that subsist in God’s Essence, such as His life, knowledge, power, speech, will, hearing, and seeing—all of which are mutually distinct. Ḥanbalis even affirmed a face, two hands, two eyes, a sitting (*istiwāʾ*), and a descending (*nuzūl*) for God while claiming ignorance about the ontological modality (*kayfiyya*) of these attributes. Meanwhile, Muʿtazilī and Twelver theologians negated entitative attributes from God. Instead, they identified God’s attributes with His singular essence; thus, God’s life, knowledge, and power are identical to Himself. Many Islamic philosophers in the *falsafa* tradition followed a similar approach as the Muʿtazila on the matter of divine attributes, but they argued for a negative theology of the Divine Essence.¹

While Ismāʿīlī thought has had a variety of manifestations over history across different regions, upholding *tawhīd* was always an ultimate concern for Ismāʿīlī thinkers. Ismāʿīlī theology is a careful attempt to speak about God in the most appropriate manner possible within the confines of human language. Ismāʿīlī philosophers, both past and present, are infamous for taking a radically apophatic approach to the theology of *tawhīd* and criticising other approaches for falling short in this regard. Unlike many other Muslim groups, the Ismāʿīlis prefer to *negate* all positive attributes (such as life, knowledge, or power) and all privative attributes (such as death, ignorance, or incapacity) from God. God in His absolute unity transcends all creaturely categories, both material and spiritual, such that He cannot even be called a ‘thing’ or an ‘existent’. This approach results in the Ismāʿīlis asserting that God is neither existent nor non-existent since He transcends the ontological scope of created things which partake in both existence and non-existence. This type of apophatic or negative theology is admittedly shocking at first glance and seems to run counter to everyday conceptions of God. However, Ismāʿīlī teaching is based on a rigorous commitment to language and logic, which Ismāʿīlī aspirants were gradually guided through.

Islamic theological schools often engaged in mutual polemics with each group undermining the theology of the other by using rational and scriptural arguments. Accordingly, many Muslim thinkers attacked Ismāʿīlī theology by portraying it in the worst possible light. They often accused Ismāʿīlī articulations of *tawhīd* as being logically incoherent, violating linguistic conventions, or amounting to nothing more than atheism under a Muslim garb. Such attacks came from all quarters including traditionalist and rationalist Muslim schools. The Ashʿarī theologian known as the ‘Imām of the Two Holy Places’, al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), accused the Ismāʿīlī teaching of being logically incoherent be-

1 For a survey of these views, see Aydogan Kars, *Unsayings God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

cause he interprets the Ismāʿīlī belief that God transcends existence and non-existence as a sort of agnosticism. Al-Juwaynī believes the Ismāʿīlīs can neither deny nor affirm God's reality and existence.² The Zaydī Imām al-Muʿaḥḥad bi-Llāh (d. 411/1020) accused the Ismāʿīlīs of denying God entirely and affirming contradictions: 'For their ignorance (*li-jahlihim*) and excessive stupidity (*farṭ ḡhabāwatihim*) they do not know that the negation of the negation necessitates the affirmation (*naḥī al-naḥī yaqtaḍī al-ithbāt*) according to the linguists (*ahl al-lisān*) ... and thus they denied what they had just affirmed and they revoked what they had said. And this is nothing of what is unknown. But their aim in this is arriving at denying of God all attributes (*taʿṭīl*) and denying the creator (*naḥī al-ṣānʿ*).'³ The Muʿtazilī scholar al-Bustī (d. 420/1029) levelled similar charges and accused the Ismāʿīlīs of 'leaving the realm of reason' (*kharajū ʿan qismat al-ʿaql*).⁴ Other Muʿtazilī like al-Jishumī (d. 494/1101) referred to Ismāʿīlī theology as 'nonsense' (*fāsīd*) and an atheistic denial of God (*naḥī al-ṣānʿ*) while Ibn al-Malāḥimī (d. 536/1141) critiqued their dual negation discourse as 'irrational' (*wa-dhālika lā yaʿqil aṣlan*). Even the Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who himself was subject to much criticism, concluded that the Ismāʿīlīs on account of their negative theology were the most extreme of all groups: 'They are the extremists of the extremists (*ghulāt al-ghulāt*). They negate from Him all contradictories (*al-naqīḍayn*), and say, "[He is] neither existent nor non-existent, neither living nor dead, neither knowing nor ignorant."⁵ Accordingly, Ibn Taymiyya accused the Ismāʿīlīs of negating mutually contradictory propositions (*al-naqīḍayn*) about God and violating the rules of logic.

If an outside observer took these Sunnī polemical appraisals of Ismāʿīlī theology at face value, they would conclude that such positions on *tawḥīd* were sectarian at best, heterodox and incoherent at worst, and belong to the margins of Islamic intellectual history. In fact, modern scholars sometimes endorsed such a judgement. Joseph van Ess flatly stated that Ismāʿīlīs had a 'radical position' on *tawḥīd* and that 'according to the view of the Islamic majority, such ideas were sectarian'.⁶ Wilfred Madelung classified Ismāʿīlī theology as a 'suprarational theology' whose core claims cannot be argued or validated by human reason. In the contemporary tradition of analytic philosophy and theology, apophatic theology in general remains a contentious project and is opposed by major Christian analytic theologians. Alvin Plantinga, famous for his dismissal of apophaticism, contends that apophatic theology is self-defeating in stating that 'God

2 Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, *A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief*, trans. Paul E. Walker (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2000), 24.

3 al-Muʿaḥḥad bi-Llāh, quoted in Eva-Maria Lika, *Proofs of Prophecy and the Refutation of the Ismāʿīlīyya: The Kitāb Ithbāt Nubuwwat al-Nabī by the Zaydī al-Muʿaḥḥad bi-Llāh al-Ḥārūnī* (d. 411/1020) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 70.

4 Ibid., 72.

5 Ibn Taymiyya, quoted in Kars, *Unsayng God*, 25, translation modified.

6 Josef van Ess, quoted in Mohammad Amin Mansouri, 'Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. ca. 787/1385) and Ismailism', *Studia Islamica* 117 (2022): 218.

is indescribable' or 'God is ineffable'—since the person who makes such a claim is also violating his own claim by making a statement about God. Proponents of this critique further argue that apophatic theologies interpret away all religious language about God, which undermines their own Christian commitments.⁷

The few analyses of Ismāʿīlī theology and metaphysics in modern scholarship are from the standpoint of descriptive intellectual history and emphasise the wide currency of Ismāʿīlī ideas: 'In the tenth century Ismaʿilism had become a powerhouse of ideas no longer limited to Ismaʿilis, but circulated among scholars of diverse orientations under their intellectual and political sway, and beyond.'⁸ However, these purely descriptive studies do not *philosophically* assess Ismāʿīlī theological ideas. This paper fills this gap by presenting a logically rigorous and textually rooted exposition of Ismāʿīlī apophatic theology based on the philosophical thought of the most prominent Ismāʿīlī Muslim Neoplatonic philosopher-*dāʿīs*—Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī (d. ca. 361/971), Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. ca. 412/1021), al-Muʿayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1077), Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. 462/1070), ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274). My primary purpose is to demonstrate the logical coherence and metaphysical merits of Ismāʿīlī apophasis both as a viable Islamic expression of *tawḥīd* and as an intellectually compelling formulation of classical theism (also called divine simplicity) in the contemporary philosophy of religion.

The first section of this study will demonstrate that Ismāʿīlīs employed natural theology to prove the existence of God and that their belief in God was rooted in rational argument. The second section focuses on how Ismāʿīlīs articulate the transcendence of God above the physical and spiritual realms through a dual negation that is consistent with the rules of logic. The third section focuses on how Ismāʿīlīs articulate divine simplicity or the absolute oneness of God by negating all attributes from Him through another type of dual negation, which is based on the Neoplatonic semantics of scalar predication. The fourth section deals with the controversial Ismāʿīlī idea that God is beyond existence and non-existence. The fifth and final section shows how Ismāʿīlī apophatic theology still accommodates positive predications about God when they are understood as metonymic descriptions as opposed to literal ones.

2. From Cosmos to Creator: Ismāʿīlī Natural Theologies

Madelung and Walker have claimed that Ismāʿīlī thinkers never attempted to prove the existence of God: 'Characteristically, Ismaili theology did not attempt to offer a proof of

7 His argument is well summarised in Joshua Matthan Brown, 'What We Can and Cannot Say: An Apophatic Response to Atheism', in *Eastern Christian Approaches to Philosophy*, ed. James Siemens and Joshua Matthan Brown (Cham: Springer, 2022), 88–90.

8 Karis, *Unsayings God*, 44.

God, that first concern of any rational theology. A rational proof of what is beyond reason and being was evidently futile.' Both scholars cited al-Sijistānī's statement, which they rendered as 'God is more certain than everything certain' (*athbatu min kulli thābit*).⁹ However, this is a misreading. Al-Sijistānī's teaching *Allāhu athbatu min kulli thābitin* (God is more subsistent than everything that subsists) is not an epistemic claim about God being 'certain' to human intellects; it is an ontological claim about God's 'subsistence', 'permanence', or ontological stability (*thabāt, thubūt, ithbāt*) in contrast to everything other than Him. Al-Sijistānī argues this position by way of a cosmological analysis in which he considers the ontological status of every level in creation, including spatially bounded (*maḥdūd*) corporeal substances and spatially unbounded (*ghayr maḥdūd*) spiritual substances.¹⁰ He observes that both bounded and unbounded existents suffer from 'pairedness' (*izdiwāj*) or metaphysical composition, which renders their existence dependent or contingent.

Al-Sijistānī substantiates his argument by documenting how corporeal physical things (the bounded existents) lack true subsistence because they have parts and undergo transformation and corruption. Spiritual substances (the unbounded existents) like the Universal Soul—the direct cause of material composites (*al-tarākib*) and corporeal motions (*ḥarakāt*)—are in a state of spiritual motion and do not subsist in one state. The Universal Soul is perpetually ascending towards perfection as it attains closer to the actuality of the Universal Intellect and receives benefit from it. Finally, the Universal Intellect—the treasury of all corporeal and spiritual treasures—is beyond all change and comes closest to God's real-true subsistence. However, the Intellect only subsists through what God eternally manifested (*mabrūz*) within it through His creative act. Therefore, everything other than God suffers from some aspect of ontological weakness and dependence upon another.¹¹ God alone is truly independent of all things: 'The subsistence (*ithbāt*) of God, may He be exalted, is beyond all relations (*al-iḍāfāt*), neither due to the existence of anything nor due to the non-existence of something else. Since His subsistence is beyond what is bounded (*al-maḥdūd*) and beyond what is unbounded (*ghayr al-maḥdūd*), it is confirmed that God is more subsistent than everything that subsists (*athbatu min kulli thābitin*).'¹²

9 Wilferd Madelung, 'Aspects of Ismaili Theology: The Prophetic Chain and the God Beyond Being', in *Ismā'īlī Contributions to Islamic Culture*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), 52–65; Paul E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 79.

10 Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-maqālīd al-malakūtiyya*, ed. Ismail K. Poonawala (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2011), 95.

11 Ibid., 95–96. Walker and Madelung take *maḥdūd* and *ghayr maḥdūd* to mean 'having a definition' and 'not having a definition', respectively, as if al-Sijistānī is trying to make epistemic claims about God lacking definitions. This reading, in the context of al-Sijistānī's *al-Maqālīd*, is incorrect. The correct meaning is bounded and unbounded existents—referring to the corporeal and spiritual things, respectively.

12 Ibid., 97.

In one passage, al-Sijistānī presents a kind of ontological argument to argue from the existence of dependent things to the absolute subsistence of God as the originator of dependent things:

Since it is possible that in the intellectual estimation (*al-wahm*), there are things subsisting that do not subsist by their own essences (*bi-dhātihā*), it is also possible that there exists external (*khārija*) to intellectual estimation, thought, and vision, that which is nobler than everything that subsists. That which exceeds the mind is not bounded, but rather, it is He who originated the bounded and unbounded [things], He whose subsistence (*ṭhabātuhu*) is beyond the bounded and unbounded [things]. Thus, it is confirmed that God is more subsistent than everything that subsists.¹³

While al-Sijistānī does not offer any formal cosmological argument for God's existence in this chapter, he provides all the key premises for such an argument. God alone is the 'real-true subsistence' (*al-ithbāt al-ḥaqīqī*) whereas the subsistence of everything other than God is merely a 'virtual subsistence' (*al-ithbāt al-majāzī*).

One generation after al-Sijistānī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī—one of the most learned Ismā'īlī philosophers—offered a formal cosmological argument for the affirmation of God by building upon the teachings of the former. In one of his exoteric treatises dedicated to proving the Ismā'īlī Imāmate, al-Kirmānī affirms that God *must* be proven first: 'it behoves us to put in first position the argument that proves the Maker, who is the Sender, on whose existence depends the existence of all.' Al-Kirmānī then explains that although God (the Maker) transcends all intellectual limits, He can be proven using a demonstrative arguments based on human knowledge of His creatures: 'Because the Maker has no quality that renders Him perceptible to sensation, nor does He have a trait that allows Him to be apprehended by the intellect, the way to prove Him follows the setting up of demonstrations consisting of both sensation and intellection as applied to the product of His making.'¹⁴ Al-Kirmānī presents his preferred argument for God in his magnum opus titled *Rāḥat al-'aql* as follows:

Among the principles is that there is no existence for the effect except by what necessitates its existence among its cause to whom its existence is connected and upon whom its existence depends. If it [the cause] did not exist then it [the effect] would not exist ... Since it is the case that some of the existents are dependent upon others and if some of those [existents] upon which others depend and whose existence

¹³ Ibid., 98.

¹⁴ Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, *Master of the Age*, ed. and trans. Paul E. Walker (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 43–44.

is connected to were not established in existence and were non-existent, then the existence of these latter is impossible. When it is confirmed that there is no existence for this one [existent] except through that one [existent], it becomes known from this that He with whom the existents terminate, through whom they exist, upon whom they depend, and from whom they obtain existence is God, there is no god except Him, whose non-existence (*laysīyya*) is impossible and whose non-ipseity is false, since if He were non-existent (*lays*), it would entail that the existents are also non-existent. But since the existents exist, His non-existence is false.¹⁵

The argument of al-Kirmānī is similar to Ibn Sīnā's contingency argument for God as Necessary Existence through Itself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihī*), which he was formulating around the same time. Al-Kirmānī deductively argues that the existence of dependent realities logically necessitates an absolutely independent reality—namely, God—who is the ultimate ground, source, or originator for all dependent realities. This is because dependent existents, at any and all moment that they exist, are in need and/or depend upon other existents. The latter, if they are dependent existents, also dependent upon other things. This chain of dependence cannot continue in an infinite regress of dependent existents—otherwise, nothing would exist. Therefore, al-Kirmānī concludes that there must logically be an independent or self-sufficient reality, namely, God, who cannot be non-existent. In contrast to all created things, God 'with respect to what He is in Himself is not in need of anything other than Himself and [is not in need of] anything upon which He depends ... He transcends being in need of anything other than Himself to which [His Ipseity] is connected.'¹⁶ Al-Kirmānī's arguments show that Ismā'īlī philosophers upheld a radically apophatic theology of God's Essence while also constructing cosmological arguments to demonstrate the reality and uniqueness of God. In subsequent sections, al-Kirmānī argues for the existence of the First Intellect and secondary Intellects using deductive arguments.

Al-Kirmānī's approach of using natural theology to prove the reality of God continued in the next generation of Ismā'īlī philosophers. Nāṣir-i Khusraw employed various cosmological arguments to prove the existence of the entire Neoplatonic cosmic hierarchy. He first argued for the existence of the Maker of the corporeal world (*ṣāni'-'yi 'ālam-i jism*) by providing ten arguments, each of which builds upon certain features of the physical hylomorphic Cosmos.¹⁷ He then identified this 'world-maker' with the Universal Soul (*naṣ-i kull*) responsible for causing the goal-directed motions in the physical Cosmos and inscribing intelligible forms upon Prime Matter.¹⁸ Next, Khusraw argued for the existence

15 Hamid al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut: Dār al-Andalūs, 1983), 129–30.

16 Ibid., 131.

17 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir*, ed. Muḥammad 'Imādī Ḥā'irī and Ismā'īl 'Imādī Ḥā'irī (Tehran: Mirāth-i maktūb, 2005), 136–50 (ch. 14).

18 Ibid., 151–66.

of the Universal Intellect as the efficient cause of the Universal Soul and the final cause of its goal-directed activity.¹⁹ Having established the Neoplatonic hierarchy of efficient causes and effects, Khusraw then presents two arguments for affirmation (*ithbāt*) of God as the True Originator (*mubdi'-yi haqq*) of the chain of causes and effects. His first argument points to the fact that both causes and effects exist: the corporeal world (*'ālam-i jismānī*) is the effect of an eternal cause (*'illat-i qadīm*). He then reasons that efficient causes and effects are essentially conjoined (*payvasta*) and therefore inseparable. Any two realities which are conjoined and inseparable are 'paired' (*juft-karda*). The existence of 'paired' things necessarily entails the existence of a 'Pairer' (*juft-kunanda*)—He who pairs together composite beings including causes and effects. Khusraw identifies this 'Pairer' with God—whom he calls the 'Causer' (*'āll*), absolute simple (*fard*), one (*aḥad*), and independent (*ṣamad*). Unlike causes and effects, God's origination is only a trace (*athar*) from Him and a trace is not conjoined to the tracer (*mu'aththir*).²⁰ Khusraw's second argument for God also argues cosmologically from the existence of causes and effects. He begins by observing that every cause is conjoined to its respective effect and that the action of each cause comes to be within its effect. He then observes that every cause is *specifically directed* towards producing its particular effect due to the existence of a specification (*khāṣiyyat*) within each cause; this specification is what bestows existence (*hast-kunanda*) upon the effect. Thus, he concludes, every cause is specified (*makhṣūṣ*) towards producing a specific effect. From this cosmological fact, Khusraw concludes that the existence of specification (*khāṣiyyat*) and the specified (*makhṣūṣ*) logically entails the existence of a 'Specifier' (*mukhaṣṣiṣ*), a 'Causer' (*'illat-kunanda*, *'āll*), or 'Causer-Maker' (*sāzanda-yi 'illat*, *dahanda-yi 'illat*), who bestows causal powers upon causes and directs them towards their effects; this is God, the true Originator (*mubdi'-yi haqq*), who originates all the causes and effects. In this way, Khusraw cosmologically and rationally argues for the reality of God as the originator of causes and effects.

Regardless of how one views the merits of these Ismā'īlī cosmological arguments, it cannot be ignored that Ismā'īlī philosophers clearly *did* present rational arguments for the affirmation (*ithbāt*) of God. The polemical charge from Sunnī opponents that Ismā'īlīs neither affirm nor deny the Creator and end up in agnosticism or that they simply deny God has no real basis. Likewise, the scholarly narrative that Ismā'īlīs did not attempt to prove God and discouraged such proofs is outdated and requires revisions based on the evidence presented above.

3. Divine Simplicity: God as Absolute Unity

The Ismā'īlīs uphold a strong version of what contemporary philosophers of religion

¹⁹ Ibid., 160–74.

²⁰ Ibid., 168.

call 'divine simplicity'. This is the thesis that God has neither physical nor metaphysical parts of any kind. God's ontological unity or simplicity excludes any kind of distinction within Him—such as form/matter, essence/existence, substance/accident, essence/attribute. Al-Sijistānī, Khusrāw, and al-Shahrastānī argue that the unity or oneness of God is not merely the numerical oneness of the number 'one'; nor is God's unity merely the opposite of compound numbers such as two, three, four; nor is the oneness of God that of a unitive totality of various parts; nor is it a merely abstract unity like the unity of a genus or species. These various types of unity each embed some degree of multiplicity. Numerical oneness can be divided into multiple components or compounded into further quantities. Multiplicity of any kind signifies an ontological weakness and dependence within God, since a whole may depend upon its parts or parts may depend upon a whole.²¹ Divine aseity requires that the oneness or unity of God be an 'absolute oneness' (*al-fardāniyya al-khālīṣa*) totally removed from any and all multiplicity.²²

Let us consider: if God possesses any positive ontological feature—an aspect, attribute, quality, accident—that is intrinsic to and numerically distinct from Himself, then it must be that (a) God depends upon that feature for His ipseity, thus rendering God into a dependent reality lacking aseity; (b) that positive ontological feature itself depends upon God's ipseity, thus rendering that feature into a creation; (c) both God and His positive ontological feature are independent, thus resulting in two gods each possessing aseity; or (d) God and His positive ontological feature are either co-dependent or both dependent upon some higher reality that causes them to be joined.²³ Therefore, God's unity admits of no distinctions. His is an absolute unity incomparable to anything else in existence: 'His unity (*wāḥidīyya*) exceeds numbers because He is not divisible through the duality of what He has created and originated ... thus, He is "the One" (*al-wāḥid*) beyond every "numerical one", both natural and spiritual; and [He is] "the Unique" (*al-aḥad*), who is not perceived except by the negation of everything expressions affirm and negate.'²⁴ God's absolute simplicity also accounts for why there cannot be two or more gods; if this were the case, then each 'god' would be ontologically complex in possessing a 'common property' shared by both and a 'specific property' differentiating one from the other. But since ontologically complexity entails dependence, God must be one without a second.²⁵

One necessary consequence of God's unity transcending any form of multiplicity is that the Ismāʿīlī philosophers identify the root-principle of both numerical oneness

21 See al-Sijistānī, *al-Maqālīd*, 86–88; Nāṣir-i Khusrāw, *Between Reason and Revelation: Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, trans. Eric Ormsby (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 135–38; ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Struggling with the Philosopher: A Refutation of Avicenna's Metaphysics*, trans. Wilferd Madelung and Toby Mayer (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 37–38, 46–47, 55–57.

22 al-Sijistānī, *al-Maqālīd*, 65.

23 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*, 152–53.

24 al-Sijistānī, *al-Maqālīd*, 87.

25 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*, 142.

and multiplicity with the first creation of God—the Universal Intellect—as opposed to God Himself. The Universal Intellect is ‘the one who is the root-source (*aṣl*) and cause of the numbers, called the *pure one*’.²⁶ However, this originated Intellect is ontologically composite; it is not an ‘absolute one’ but rather a ‘multiple one’ (*al-wāḥid al-mutakath-thir*) because its own being is constituted by the union of two distinct aspects: the first aspect is a pure oneness (*fardāniyya*, *waḥda*) identical to God’s creative act known as ‘God’s Command’; the second aspect is its own ‘essence’ or quiddity.²⁷ Furthermore, God’s absolute unity beyond all multiplicity entails that He cannot directly create or originate multiple creations; this is because multiple products issuing directly from God necessitate multiple aspects within His Essence. Rather, the direct, unmediated creation of God must necessarily be a numerically single entity—the Universal Intellect. The Intellect—being externally single and internally complex—then functions as the direct source of numerical unity and multiplicity through its emanation of the Universal Soul.

4. Divine Dual Negation: God Transcends His Creation

Affirming a strong account of divine simplicity brings forth the age-old challenge of correctly and adequately talking about God. In contemporary philosophy of religion, divine simplicity is heavily criticised by Christian theologians like Alvin Plantinga and William Lane Craig. They charge divine simplicity with being incoherent and unintelligible, leading to modal collapse, and rendering God ineffable such that one cannot know or say anything about God at all. The Ismā‘īlī method of upholding absolute divine simplicity is to present a radical but internally consistent negative theology or apophysis. Modern analytic theologians like Plantinga and Mullins have strongly objected to apophysis, arguing that whoever claims that ‘God is ineffable’ or ‘God is indescribable’ as a doctrine is contradicting himself in making any statement about God. But this modern objection is a strawman of what most apophatic theologians are saying. The Ismā‘īlī position is that God cannot be qualified, described, or attributed with any attribute that is found among created beings. In common with other Shī‘ī Muslims, the Ismā‘īlīs draw inspiration from the below sermon of Imām ‘Alī, who taught the necessity of *negating all attributes* from God:

Foremost in religion is knowledge of Him, and the perfection of this knowledge is believing in Him, and the perfection of this belief is affirming His oneness, and the perfection of this affirmation is to purify one’s devotion to Him, and the perfection of this purification is to divest Him of all attributes—because of the testimony of every attribute that it is other than the object of attribution, and because of the

²⁶ al-Sijistānī, *al-Maqālīd*, 65.

²⁷ Ibid., 65–67; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-‘aql*, 176–80; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Between Reason and Revelation*, 136–38.

testimony of every such object that it is other than the attribute. So whoever ascribes an attribute to God—glorified be He!—has conjoined Him [with something else], and whoever so conjoins Him has made Him twofold, and whoever makes Him twofold has fragmented Him, and whoever thus fragments Him is ignorant of Him.²⁸

In the words of al-Kirmānī: ‘When we say according to the affirmation of the method of negation [of attributes] that He is not *this*, and *not that*, and *not that*, and *not that*, all that we negate is from what exists within His creation. By means of this, He for whom attributes do not apply is affirmed.’²⁹ Stated in more analytic terms, this means that God cannot be the subject of any real predications that also apply to His creatures. This principle logically follows from God’s aseity and absolute oneness. If there is a real predicate or attribute that applies to God and applies to a created being, it follows that this common predication refers to an attribute that is shared (*amr mushtarak*) between God and the creature. This entails that God is ontologically complex, as His ipseity would be dependent upon and composed of the conjunction of His Essence and the shared attribute referred to by the common predication. Thus, Ismā‘īlī apophasis is firmly rooted in a logical and rational analysis of God’s aseity and simplicity. For Ismā‘īlīs and like-minded apophatic theologians, the very fact that God is unlike anything in His creation is a rationally defensible position and not based on some fideistic appeal to mystery.

One of the unique features of Ismā‘īlī theological discourse is the precise way that Ismā‘īlīs employ their apophasis to articulate God’s transcendence or dissimilarity (*tan-zīh*) over created things. To be sure, almost every theological school among Hindus, Jews, Christians, and Muslims employs some negative theology to talk about God. In classical Islam, most Muslim thinkers including the Mu‘tazila, Ash‘arīs, Māturīdīs, and the Muslim Peripatetics negate all physical characteristics from God: God is immaterial, incorporeal, atemporal, spaceless, placeless, directionless, colourless, shapeless, odourless, motionless, non-composite, and so forth.³⁰ For many monotheists, negating physical attributes from God is hardly controversial and logically necessary. Ismā‘īlī philosophers agreed with these negations. But most *kalām* theologians held to a cosmology where God alone is the sole eternal and incorporeal existent while everything other than God is both temporal and material. Therefore, they found it sufficient to negate corporeal and temporal attributes from God. However, in Ismā‘īlī cosmology, God’s creation consists of ‘two worlds’ (*‘ālamayn*): a corporeal world of ‘bounded’ (*maḥdūd*) material entities consisting of matter, space, time, bodies, and motions subject to corporeal limits (*ḥudūd*), and an ‘unbounded’ (*ghayr maḥdūd*) spiritual world of intellects, souls, angels, and spirits without

28 ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, *Nahj al-balāgha*, sermon 1, quoted in Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ‘Alī* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 208.

29 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-‘aql*, 138.

30 See al-Juwaynī, *Guide*, 24–30.

corporeal limits. Therefore, for Ismāʿīlī thinkers, negating corporeal attributes from God does not go far enough in establishing God's absolute transcendence and dissimilarity in contrast to His creation. As al-Sijistānī argues, merely negating physical qualities from God still affirms that God is similar to various spiritual entities that are also within His creation: 'What does not have [corporeal] attributes, limits, or descriptions is not God in His Essence but rather, it is the Soul, the Intellect, and all of the simple substances among the angels and others.'³¹ In fact, many modern analytic theologians fall into this trap. Richard Swinburne defines God as 'a person without a body (i.e. a spirit) who is eternal, free, able to do anything, knows everything.'³² Likewise, William Lane Craig holds that 'God is very much like an unembodied soul; indeed, as a mental substance God just seems to be a soul.'³³ For Ismāʿīlīs, however, construing God as a unembodied spirit, mind, mental substance, soul, or immaterial person is a category error that renders God similar to some of His creations. Al-Sijistānī condemns what many *kalām* theologians and modern thinkers like Craig and Swinburne uphold as a 'hidden anthropomorphism' (*tashbīh khafī*) that confounds God with spiritual creations as opposed to an 'overt anthropomorphism' (*tashbīh jalī*) that invests God with physical properties.³⁴

Based on their 'two-worlds' cosmology, Ismāʿīlī philosophers see it necessary to negate both *corporeal* and *spiritual* attributes from God to truly articulate God's unity and transcendence. It is correct that God is not material, not corporeal, not temporal, not coloured, not shaped, not in motion, and not in a place because He transcends the attributes of the physical world; and further, God is also not immaterial, not incorporeal, not atemporal, not colourless, not shapeless, not motionless, and not placeless in the manner of spiritual creatures because He transcends the qualities of the spiritual world. Rather, God's unity transcends both categories of things. God is not bounded (*maḥdūd*) in the manner of corporeal substances, nor is He unbounded (*ghayr maḥdūd*) in the manner of spiritual substances.

Unfortunately, certain polemicists have misconstrued the Ismāʿīlī 'dual negation' (*sal-ibatayn*) as a 'double negation' consisting of two contradictory statements.³⁵ Others take the Ismāʿīlīs to be committing *taʿṭīl*, a denial or agnosticism concerning God. However, if one reads this Ismāʿīlī apophysis very closely and within its own cosmological context, these objections miss the mark. Take the dual negation that 'God is not corporeal (*jismānī*) and not incorporeal (*rūḥānī*)'—which Ismāʿīlīs also render as 'God is not bounded (*lā maḥdūd*) and God is not unbounded (*lā ghayr maḥdūd*)' and 'God is not corporeally attributed (*lā mawṣūf*) and not corporeally non-attributed (*lā lā mawṣūf*)'. Firstly, one must

31 al-Sijistānī, *al-Maqālīd*, 80.

32 Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1–2.

33 James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 594.

34 al-Sijistānī, *al-Maqālīd*, 81.

35 Ibid., 80.

be clear about what the predicates *jismānī/rūḥānī*, *maḥdūd/ghayr maḥdūd*, and *mawṣūf/lā mawṣūf* are supposed to mean. The first predicate—*jismānī/maḥdūd/mawṣūf*—rigidly designates all physical and material substances; the second—*rūḥānī/ghayr maḥdūd/lā mawṣūf*—rigidly designates all spiritual and immaterial substances like intellects, souls, angels, and other simple substances. These binary predicates are contraries (*diddayn*) but they are not contradictories (*naqīdayn*) because God, as the creator of the physical and spiritual realms, is not a member of either one of them. The charge of *taʿṭīl* does not hold, as al-Kirmānī argues, because the negative particle *lā* in both negations (e.g. *innahu lā mawṣūf wa-lā huwa lā mawṣūf*) is not directed towards God's ipseity (*huwīyya*) but rather, to specific predications like *mawṣūf/maḥdūd*; meanwhile, the 'thatness' (*in-nīyya*) of God is maintained by the term *innahu* that begins each negative proposition. Therefore, God's ipseity is always affirmed even in negative statements that deny specific attributes to Him.³⁶

The first negation—'God is not corporeal/bounded/attributed'—is an *external negation of a positive predicate*, rendered as 'it is *not* the case that God is corporeal/bounded/attributed'.³⁷ The contradictory of this statement is the affirmation that 'God is corporeal/bounded/attributed' or 'it is the case that God is corporeal/bounded/attributed'. The second negation—'God is not incorporeal/unbounded/non-attributed' is the *external negation of a negative predicate*. First, there is an *internal negation* with the term—'incorporeal/unbounded/non-attributed'—which forms a new predicate with the same syntactic range as the old predicate (corporeal/bounded/attributed) but with the reverse meaning; in this context, it refers to all spiritual or immaterial existents. This internal negation—'God is incorporeal/unbounded/non-attributed'—is then subject to an external negation with God as the subject, rendered as 'it is not the case that God is incorporeal/unbounded/non-attributed'. Putting the first and second negations together, one arrives at: 'It is not the case that God is corporeal/bounded/attributed, nor is it the case that God is incorporeal/unbounded/non-attributed.' As argued by al-Sijistānī, the two statements are both *external negations* and they are not contradictories (*naqīdayn*) because each statement is the negation of a real predicate whose signification covers a *positive ontological range*: 'As for when there are two negative statements—one of them negating the attributes affixed to corporeal beings (*al-jismānīyyīn*) and the other negating the attributes affixed to spiritual beings (*al-rūḥānīyyīn*)—this leads to isolating (*tajrīd*) the Creator from the attributes and qualities of created beings.'³⁸

The Ismāʿīlī method of negating both corporeal and spiritual attributes from God stands out among other forms of classical Muslim theology championed by the *kalām*

36 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*, 148–49.

37 On external vs internal negations, see John N. Martin, 'Existence, Negation, and Abstraction in the Neoplatonic Hierarchy', *History and Philosophy of Logic* 16, no. 2 (1995): 171–72.

38 al-Sijistānī, *al-Maḥālīd*, 81.

theologians and the Muslim Peripatetics. However, the Sufi Akbarī metaphysical tradition associated with Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) would adopt the same apophatic approach taken by the Ismāʿīlis. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 730–36/1329–35), in a passage highly reminiscent of al-Sijistānī, states that ‘he who “purifies” God purifies Him from all bodily attributes, but by that very act he is (unconsciously) “assimilating” (*tashbih*) Him with non-material, spiritual beings.’³⁹ Al-Kāshānī is in full agreement with al-Sijistānī in criticising what he calls a ‘delimiting and speculative transcendence’ (*al-tanzīh al-taqyīdī al-fikrī*), which only divests God of the attributes of bodies but still makes Him similar to the spirits (*arwāḥ*).⁴⁰ Al-Kāshānī’s solution is identical to that of the Ismāʿīlis: one must perform a ‘dual negation’, such as the following: ‘The truth of the matter is that the Absolute transcends both being in a direction and not being in a direction, having a position and not having a position; it transcends also all determinations originating from the senses, reason, imagination, representation, and thinking.’⁴¹ Thus, the Ismāʿīlī dual negation discourse of purifying God of both corporeal and spiritual attributes has both logical structure and endorsement in Akbarī Sufi metaphysics.

The upshot of Ismāʿīlī apophasis is that God transcends all ontological, metaphysical, and physical categories. God is beyond both being a cause or an effect; rather, He is the ‘causer’ (*muʿīll*, *ʿāl*: ‘the maker of causes’).⁴² He transcends being a substance or an accident, for He originates both spiritual and bodily substances. He is neither a body, nor a soul, nor an intellect. God transcends the temporality (*zamān*) of physical things, the perpetuity (*daymūmiyya*) of the souls, and the eternity (*azaliyya*) of the intellects; rather, He is the ‘eternaliser’ (*azal*) who causes the existence of what is eternal (*azalī*).⁴³ These negative propositions are all logical as they negate several category errors with respect to God. Most monotheistic theologians would agree that God, since He is not physical, falls outside various predicate categories whose scope applies to the natural world. These category errors take the form of dual negations that echo Ismāʿīlī discourses. For example: God is neither healthy nor sick; God is neither inside the universe nor outside the universe; God is neither bearded nor beardless; God is neither dry nor wet; God is neither even nor odd; God is neither healthy nor unhealthy; God is not in motion nor at rest. To be sure, these statements *would only be contradictory* if the subject in each statement was a physical spatio-temporal entity. But since God transcends being physical in any way, the negated predicates are merely contraries as opposed to contradictories.

39 al-Kāshānī, quoted in Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 50.

40 Mansouri, ‘Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī’, 212.

41 al-Kāshānī, quoted in Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 51.

42 al-Sijistānī, *al-Maqālīd*, 70.

43 Ibid., 117, 164–65.

5. Divine Ultimacy: God Transcends Attributes

All Muslim theologians must account for the scriptural descriptions of God found in the Qur'an, Sunna, and ritual practices of Islam, such as the ninety-nine names of God or various statements ascribing a face, hands, eyes, sitting, and descent to God. Ḥanbalī scholars interpreted many descriptions of God as referring to real-distinct attributes of God, including God's face, hands, and so on, while insisting that these attributes are 'without modality' (*bi-lā kayf*). The Ash'arī and Māturīdī theologians interpret some divine names as referring to uncreated 'entitative attributes' (*ṣifāt ma'nawīyya*) that subsist in God's Essence: God is knowing (*'ālim*) through His uncreated knowledge (*'ilm*); God is powerful (*qādir*) through His uncreated power (*qudra*); and so on.⁴⁴ These theologians held that 'God's attributes are not identical to God's Essence and they are not other (*ghayr*) than God's Essence.'⁴⁵ Meanwhile the Mu'tazila accept the divine names and attributes as real predications about God, but they interpret them by saying that every divine attribute (*ṣifa*) is ontologically identical to God's Essence.⁴⁶

The Ismā'īlī philosophers, in presenting their unique position, refuted the views of the above Muslim theological camps. First, they dismissed the Ḥanbalī literalism as crass anthropomorphism amounting to polytheistic pantheon of ninety-nine uncreated entities that comprise God. As Khusraw argued: 'They state that God has ninety-nine names, each of which has its own distinct meaning. But any rational person knows that anyone who has ninety-nine names cannot be a single person, for each one of the ninety-nine names must have its own essence. Polytheism, not monotheism, underlies this group's teachings.'⁴⁷ As for the Ash'arī-Māturīdī theologies of God possessing several entitative attributes that eternally subsist in His Essence, the Ismā'īlīs argued against the coherence of this view. Al-Kirmānī argues that affirming entitative attributes for God leads to two outcomes: (1) it either entails that God is dependent upon the attribute for His subsistence; or (2) the attribute depends upon God who necessitates it. If God depends upon the attribute for His subsistence, then God is contingent: 'He upon whom the existents depend for their existence would be in need of another (*al-ghayr mustaghniyyan*) insofar as He is He to subsist.'⁴⁸ The phrasing in some Sunnī *kalām* texts like 'God is knowing through knowledge' or 'living through life' implies that God's ipseity depends upon the attributes

44 On this ontology of the divine attributes, see Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī's Moderation in Belief*, trans. Aladdin M. Yaqub (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 129–55.

45 For a defence of this formula, see Abdurrahman Mihirig, 'Classical *Kalām* and the Laws of Logic', Maydan, 23 April 2021, <https://themaydan.com/2021/04/classical-kalam-and-the-laws-of-logic/>. Al-Ghazālī writes in *Moderation in Belief*: 'The seven attributes, which we established, are not the [divine] essence. Rather, they are additional to the essence' (129).

46 See Abū al-Hudhayl, quoted in Kifayat Ullah, *Al-Kashshāf: Al-Zamakhshari's Mu'tazilite Exegesis of the Qur'an* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 105.

47 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Between Reason and Revelation*, 51.

48 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql*, 151.

themselves.⁴⁹ Furthermore, this divine attribute itself must depend on something else for its own subsistence. This either entails an infinite regress of dependent realities or the series must terminate at a self-subsistent, independent, and absolutely simple reality that does not have any entitative attributes—which is exactly what Ismāʿīlīs claim about God. On the other hand, if one says that God's attribute depends upon God's Essence—as some Sunnis like al-Taftāzānī and certain modern analytic philosophers (Wolterstorff, Fowler, Baddorf) propose—then this is an admission that God in His absolute unity, considered without any attribute, is independent or sufficient in Himself and has no need for the attribute; whereas the attribute is dependent upon God. Therefore, the divine attributes register as dependent created beings.⁵⁰ Al-Kirmānī thereby concludes: 'He [God] transcends and is sanctified from the attributes that fall under His creation while He, the Exalted, is the maker (*fāʿil*) of them and all other things.'⁵¹

The Ismāʿīlī critique of the Muʿtazilī doctrine of God's attributes being identical to His Essence is far more measured. The Muʿtazilī position appealed to many adjacent Muslim thinkers including the Twelver Shīʿa, Zaydī Shīʿa, early Muslim Peripatetics like al-Kindī and al-Fārābī, and the school of Ibn Sīnā. Muʿtazilī divine simplicity is likewise upheld by medieval and contemporary Christian classical theists, including Augustine, Aquinas, James Dolezal, Edward Feser, and Robert Koons. The Ismāʿīlī philosophers credited the Muʿtazila for being correct in denying 'entitative attributes' in God, but they find the *positive claim* that 'God's attributes are identical to His Essence' to be incoherent. The formula that God's attributes are identical to Himself or His Essence equivocates on the term 'attribute' (*ṣifa*); within the discourse of Islamic metaphysics generally, an attribute (*ṣifa*) is always distinct from its subject of attribution (*mawṣūf*), namely, a subject (*jawhar*) or essence (*dhāt*), in which the attribute subsists. However, when the Muʿtazila and other classical theists speak of God's attributes being identical to Himself, they are *not* referring to 'attributes' in the ordinary sense of the word. The phrase 'God's attributes are identical to Himself' translates into a tautology that 'God is identical to God', in which no real-distinct attribute is being affirmed of God after all. Second, those who identify every divine attribute—like God's power, life, mercy, or knowledge—with God's Essence are susceptible to this common objection: this belief implies that power, life, and knowledge are one and the same, yet this is clearly not the case for created beings. In response, the Muʿtazilī classical theist will further argue that power, life, and knowledge are only *distinct for creatures*, but for God, they are absolutely identical. Ontologically speaking this is perfectly acceptable for Ismāʿīlīs; however, it leads to linguistic and semantic ambiguities. Given the ontological gap between God's Essence and creaturely life/power/knowledge, it no longer makes any sense to use the

49 For such statements, see al-Ghazālī, *Moderation in Belief*, 129.

50 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*, 151–53.

51 Ibid., 153.

same predicates to describe God and describe creaturely attributes within the same discourse. To do so is to commit a category error, at least verbally.

This conclusion leads directly to the Ismāʿīlī position—that God in His absolute transcendent unity transcends possessing any real attributes or ontic predicates. In reality, God is neither living nor dead, neither knowing nor ignorant, neither powerful nor impotent, and likewise for all real predications because His Essence transcends all descriptions that apply to His creation. Khusraw emphatically argues this point as follows:

Just as you call it wrong to say that He is ignorant, so too is it wrong to say that He is knowing, and for this reason: Knowing and not-knowing are both of them human traits. You term God 'knowing' because it is not fitting to say 'ignorant' of Him; you suppose that one ought not call God 'ignorant' because this is an ugly name, while it is fine to call Him 'knowing' since this is a good name. You imagine that it is wrong to call God 'ignorant' because this name is bad, and you are of the opinion too that since names which are ugly and repellent ought not to be applied to God, it is appropriate to use fine and upstanding names; and yet, this notion of yours is wrong.

And just as you ought not ascribe to God a human attribute such as ignorance, so too you ought not ascribe knowledge, which is also a human attribute, to Him—glory be to Him—inasmuch as knowledge is a trait which is proper to ascribe to man, and so too is ignorance a trait properly belonging to him.

Now we have shown clearly on what grounds it is wrong to describe God by such attributes as 'ignorance' and 'powerlessness'—not because they are unseemly but because they are attributes of creatures—as well as that it is also wrong to ascribe the opposites of such attributes, such as 'knowledge' and 'power', to Him—glory be to Him, He is exalted—on the grounds that these too are creaturely qualities. The so-called theologians of this community have plunged into a grievous error in their inquiry, in ascribing their own fine qualities to God and in declaring Him devoid of their bad qualities. And for this very reason, they have fallen into polytheism. They fail to grasp that whoever worships a thing whose attribute is of a creaturely nature in effect worships a creature, not its Creator.⁵²

Khusraw and other Ismāʿīlī philosophers advocate for a 'dual negation' of all real predications with respect to God. This form of dual negation, where one negates a positive predicate and its opposite from God, is distinct from the dual negation seen earlier—where one negates both corporeal and spiritual qualities from God. However, both types of dual negation are rooted in the same goal—to purify the concept of God from all creaturely

⁵² Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Between Reason and Revelation*, 54–55.

and contingent attributes. As seen earlier, Muslims from other theological camps often accused Ismāʿīlis of logical incoherence and/or agnosticism when they negated both positive and negative predications from God. However, Ismāʿīli apophasis turns out to be quite logical and internally consistent in light of recent philosophical studies on the logic of negation. The Ismāʿīli apophatic position that ‘God is not living/powerful/ knowing and God is not dead/impotent/ignorant’ must be understood with reference to Neoplatonic scalar predication and negation as documented by John N. Martin.⁵³

In Neoplatonic thought, positive and negative predications are all *scalar* and presuppose a hierarchy of ontological value behind every real predication. Take, for example, the scalar predicates that describe the temperature of water in descending order in Table 1.

TABLE 1: *Example of Neoplatonic scalar predications*

Scalar predicates of water temperature (various adjectives)	Scalar predicates of water temperature (indexed to ‘warm’)
Boiling	Boiling: hyper-warm
Hot	Hot: hyper-warm
Warm	Warm
Tepid	Sub-warm
Cold	Sub-warm

In Table 1, the left-hand column lists various adjectives that hierarchically describe the temperature of water from boiling down to cold. The right-hand column describes the same hierarchy but uses ‘warm’ as the point of reference; ‘hyper-’ refers to all temperature levels hotter than warm while ‘sub-’ refers to temperatures cooler than warm. Within this scalar framework, a positive or negative predication by itself is semantically ambiguous. ‘The water is not warm’ is a simple negation, but it can mean one of two things: either the water is ‘hyper-warm’ (boiling or hot); or the water is ‘sub-warm’ (tepid or cold). The first meaning is a ‘hyper-negation’ where the scalar predicate (warm) along with every level below it is negated; this means that the water is boiling or hot (hyper-warm). Hyper-negation points to a *higher* level of the scalar hierarchy. The second meaning is a ‘privative negation’ in which the scalar predicate ‘warm’ and everything higher than warm on the scale is being negated; this means that the water is tepid or cold (sub-warm). Private negations are diminutive. The main point is that *negation in and of itself* within the Neoplatonic scalar predication framework is not necessarily a deprivation or diminution of a subject. It depends on the context in which negations occur.⁵⁴

53 Martin, ‘Existence’, 173–77.

54 Ibid., 172–74.

Ismāʿīlī apophasis must be understood through the logic of this Neoplatonic scalar framework. Consider the apophatic statement ‘God is not knowing and God is not ignorant’. This statement is the conjunction of two negations, each of which on its own may be semantically ambiguous. But when combined, the resultant dual negation is clearly a *hyper-negation* within Neoplatonic scalar semantics. When one maps out the scalar hierarchy of the predicate ‘knowing’ based on Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic cosmology (see Table 2), the meaning of the phrase ‘God is not knowing and God is not ignorant’ is a *hyper-negation* that exalts God as the source of all knowledge, who transcends the hierarchy of ‘knowing’ beings.

TABLE 2: *Neoplatonic scalar predication applied to God*

Scalar predicates of ‘knowing’	Scalar predicates of ‘knowing’
Bestower of knowledge (God)	Beyond knowing and ignorant: hyper-knowing
Essentially knowing (intellect)	Knowing
Accidentally knowing (soul)	Knowing
Accidentally ignorant (soul)	Ignorant: sub-knowing
Essentially ignorant (bodies)	Ignorant: sub-knowing

The phrase ‘God is not knowing’ excludes God from the predicate range of entities that possess the attribute of knowledge either essentially (like the Universal Intellect) or accidentally (like the Universal Soul/souls). ‘God is ignorant’ is a simple private negation. ‘God is *not ignorant*’ is the *negation of a privative negation*. This negation *excludes God* from the predicate range of all entities who are *deprived of knowledge*—either because they failed to actualise knowledge (like a soul) or they are essentially unable to bear knowledge (bodies). Overall, to say that ‘God is neither knowing nor ignorant’ is *not* taking away anything from God; rather, it is a hyper-negation that establishes God’s status above the entire scalar hierarchy of the ‘knowing’/‘ignorant’ predicate range. One can colloquially translate this Ismāʿīlī hyper-negation as: ‘God is not *merely* knowing and not *merely* ignorant.’

When Ismāʿīlī philosophers negate both life and death, knowledge and ignorance, or power and incapacity from God, they are negating two contrary pairs (*ḍiddayn*) but not two contradictories (*naqīḍayn*) from God. As Michael Scott and Gabriel Citron observe: ‘Contrary statements, however, are governed by the law of contradiction but not by the law of excluded middle. So while they cannot be jointly true, it is possible for both of them to be false.’⁵⁵ This vindicates Ismāʿīlī apophasis against those Sunnī polemicists who accused them of affirming two contradictories. Scott and Citron further conclude:

55 Michael Scott and Gabriel Citron, ‘What Is Apophaticism? Ways of Talking about an Ineffable God’, *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8, no. 4 (2016): 31.

‘Apophatics, therefore, do not in general appear to be affirming contradictory sentences about God. Instead, they are presenting contrary or subcontrary sentences.’⁵⁶

This Ismā‘īlī apophasis concerning God, even if one judges it to be rather radical, may be found in some format among important post-classical Muslim thinkers. In the Akbarī Sufi tradition, various commentators of Ibn al-‘Arabī present a wholly apophatic theology of the Divine Essence that closely resembles Ismā‘īlī *tawḥīd*. Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350) speaks of God’s Essence, known as the Presence of Singularity (*aḥadiyya*), as transcending all names and attributes: ‘If the reality of Being is “conditioned by nothing accompanying it”, the Group calls it the Degree of Singularity (*al-aḥadiyya*) which effaces all the attributes and names.’⁵⁷ In another place, al-Qayṣarī says, ‘Being at the degree of Singularity (*al-aḥadiyya*) negates all individuation. There remains neither attribute (*lā ṣifa*), nor possessor of attributes (*lā mawṣūf*), nor name (*lā ism*), nor named (*lā musammā*), but only the Essence (*al-dhāt*).’⁵⁸

6. Divine Ontology: God Is Beyond Being

The most enigmatic element of Ismā‘īlī apophatic theology is the infamous claim that God is ‘beyond being’, that is, God is not existent (*ays*, *mawjūd*, *ḥast*) and God is non-existent (*lays*, *ma’dūm*, *nīst*). This distinctive Ismā‘īlī position appears to be the low-hanging fruit for Muslims of competing theological schools to refute as incoherent. But a proper assessment of the Ismā‘īlī claim must account for the semantics of the word ‘being/existence’ within Ismā‘īlī discourse, Neoplatonic thought, and Islamic thought more generally. In fact, the nature of ‘being’ and its relation to concrete ‘beings’ was a highly disputed and nuanced issue in Islamic intellectual history. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī (d. 886/1492) in his *Precious Pearl* outlines several positions taken by Islamic theologians, philosophers, and mystics. One group, identified with some of the *kalām* theologians, said that every entity—including God and creatures—has its own specific existence unique unto itself and that the term ‘existence’ is applied to various entities in name only (*lafẓan*). Another group of theologians, the majority, conceives existence as a single concept or idea (*mafhūm wāḥid*) in the mind, which is then mentally subdivided into similar concepts and attributed to various things. The view of the philosophers is that there is a single mental concept of existence but in external reality, each existing thing has its own specific existence (*wujūd khāṣṣa*)—entailing multiple existences of dissimilar realities (*al-wujūdāt al-mukhtalifāt al-ḥaqā‘iq*) in extra-mental reality—each of which is a ‘concomitant accident’ (*‘arīḍ lāzīm laḥā*) attached to an essence/quiddity. The Sufis,

⁵⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁷ Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being: The Metaphysics of Ibn al-‘Arabī in the Muqaddimat al-Qayṣarī*, trans. Mukhtar H. Ali (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 53.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 61.

however, affirm that there is One Absolutely Single Existent Reality (*ḥaqīqa wāḥida muṭlaqa mawjūda*), namely, God Himself, who is without any multiplicity, division, or entitative attributes; everything other than God, namely, creation, is the locus of a particularised manifestation (*zuhūr*) of God qua Absolute Existence.⁵⁹ What the Ismāʿīlis present concerning existence/being and its relationship to God should be situated within this broader intra-Muslim debate about ontology.

For Plotinus and his followers, the One transcends both being (*enai*) and substance (*ousia*); these notions do not apply to God. Does this mean that Plotinus denies the existence of the One? Recently scholars of Neoplatonic studies have attended to this issue and there is an emerging interpretation of Plotinus holding that he does not deny the 'existence' of the One according to our modern understandings of 'exists'. Rather, in the Greek semantics assumed by Plotinus, the verb 'to be' has the primary function of predication, with the meaning of 'to be something or another'; the same verb only takes on an existential value (with the meaning 'to exist') in very specific secondary contexts.⁶⁰ Based on this finding of Kahn, Wiitala and DiRado clarify that 'in claiming the One is beyond being (*to, enai*), Plotinus does not mean that the One does not exist, since the existence of the One is the foundation for the existence of everything else. Instead, Kahn argues that Plotinus' denial of being to the One only entails that the One cannot be a subject of true predication.'⁶¹ Therefore, when Neoplatonists say that God is beyond existence, they only mean to say that God cannot be the subject of any real predicates: 'The One exists, has *hypostasis*, as the principle underlying the things that it causes (unity, goodness, being, etc.) while nevertheless remaining beyond all real predication.'⁶²

Given how closely the Ismāʿīlis follow Plotinus's worldview, the above clarification suffices to rebut the charge that Ismāʿīlī philosophers, in exalting God beyond being and non-being, are agnostic or atheistic with respect to God. However, it is worth examining how the Ismāʿīlis understand the semantics of existence/being when they deny that God 'exists' or that He is 'a being'.

The Ismāʿīlī thinkers al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī mostly use terms like *ays* (existent, being), *aysīyya* (existence), *lays* (non-existent, not-being), and *laysīyya* (non-existence), which come from the circle of al-Kindī. For al-Sijistānī, God is not an *ays* (existent, being), but rather, He is the *muʾayyis*, meaning He is 'the giver of existence' (*aysīyya*) through His eternal creative act of command (*amr*)—which is the 'existentialisation' (*ta'yīs*) of the

59 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Jāmī, *The Precious Pearl*, trans. Nicholas L. Heer (New York: State University of New York Press, 1979), 34–35.

60 This is argued at length in Charles H. Kahn, *Essays on Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

61 Michael Wiitala and Paul DiRado, 'In What Sense Does the One Exist? Existence and Hypostasis in Plotinus', in *Platonic Pathways: Selected Papers from the Fourteenth Annual Conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*, ed. John F. Finamore and Danielle A. Layne (Gloucester: Prometheus Trust, 2018), 81.

62 *Ibid.*, 90.

existents (*aysāt*) from the non-existent (*lays*).⁶³ Al-Kirmānī writes that ‘the existent (*al-ays*) in its being an existent (*fi kawnihi aysan*) is in need of what it depends upon in existence.’⁶⁴ For Khusraw, writing in Persian, the terms *hast* (existent) and *hastī* (existence) carry the meaning of *contingent* existent—that which considered in itself may or may not exist: ‘Whatever has existence (*harcha hastī dārad*) may also be non-existent (*nīst*) as a contrary (*didd*). That to which “existent” (*hast*) does not apply, it is also not appropriate to call it non-existent. This is because both of them [existence and non-existence] are mutual contraries and whatever has a contrary cannot be God.’⁶⁵ For al-Sijistānī, al-Kirmānī, and Khusraw the term ‘existent’ (*ays*, *hast*) always has the meaning of *contingent*, *dependent*, and *originated* beings. Thus, when they say that God is neither existent (*ays*, *mawjūd*, *hast*) nor non-existent (*lays*, *ma’dūm*, *nīst*), these Ismā’īlī philosophers are only stating that God is not dependent on anything and not limited; whereas every ‘existent’ depends upon God.

Furthermore, many Ismā’īlīs conceive ‘existence’ (*aysiyya*, *hastī*) as a super-genus that subsumes the various types of things such as substances and accidents, bodies and spirits, form and matter, and so forth. Thus, whatever belongs to the category of existence must either be a substance or an accident. Since God transcends being a substance or an accident (both of which entail finitude), it is inappropriate to say God is an existent. Even if one wanted to say God is an existent in a unique manner other than substances and accidents, this would require that God is a species of existence composed of the existence genus and a differentia; this entails ontological composition in God, violates divine simplicity, and renders God dependent upon the conjunction of the existence genus and a differentia.⁶⁶ On this reading of ‘existence’, the Ismā’īlīs are in complete agreement with Plotinus, for whom the term ‘exists’ entails the limits of form and substance: ‘Plotinus is denying that the One has the sort of metaphysical structure that all beings or substances (*ousiai*) have This mutual entailment between *being* and *being something* is what leads Plotinus to say that the One is beyond being.’⁶⁷

Al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī refuse to classify God as a *mawjūd* (a being) or what possesses *wujūd* (being) for similar reasons. Al-Sijistānī understands the terms *wujūd*/*mawjūd* in the literal sense of ‘finding’/‘what is found’. From this meaning, he argues that it is inappropriate for God to be a *mawjūd* (something found) because this requires that there

63 Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, 53, 82.

64 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-‘aql*, 131.

65 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Shish faṣl or Rawshanā’i-nāma: Six Chapters or The Book of Enlightenment*, trans. Wladimir Ivanow (Leiden: E. J. Brill for The Ismaili Society, 1949), 34 (English), 6 (Persian), translation modified.

66 For existence as a kind of genus, which Khusraw interprets as a causal rank of the ontological hierarchy in accordance with Proclus’s understanding of genus–species relations, see al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-‘aql*, 131–33; al-Shahrastānī, *Struggling*, 36–42; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation: A Treatise on Philosophical Theology*, ed. and trans. Faquir Muhammad Hunzai (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 42.

67 Caleb M. Cohoe, ‘Why the One Cannot Have Parts: Plotinus on Divine Simplicity, Ontological Independence and Perfect Being Theology’, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 67, no. 269 (2017): 751–71.

be an eternal 'finder' (*wājid*) whose object of action is God; this is absurd because God cannot be the patient or direct objection of the act of any agent. If one maintains that the 'finder' is some temporal being who 'finds' God as its *mawjūd*, this entails that prior to this act of 'finding' (*wujūd*), God was a *mawjūd* and therefore, *wujūd* does not apply to God regardless.⁶⁸ For al-Kirmānī, *wujūd* is an attribute and the general argument for negating any entitative attribute from God applies to *wujūd* as well. It is either the case that the attribute of *wujūd* depends upon God, such that God is self-subsistent and independent of the attribute of *wujūd*, which is a creation, and has no need for it—which means God is not really a *wujūd* or *mawjūd*; or God Himself depends upon the attribute of *wujūd* for His subsistence, which makes God dependent like creatures and leads to an infinite regress of dependency, which is impossible.

The Ismāʿīlīs' outright refusal to speak of God as an existent within the category of existence or a being among other beings is to drive home the ontological incommensurability between God and created beings: 'He, the Exalted, is beyond being an existent (*aysan*) due to the need of the existent, in being existent, of that which precedes it who makes it exist; thus, it is absurd that He, the Exalted, should be an existent (*aysan*) when He has no need of another to be Himself and does not depend upon another.'⁶⁹ This surely cannot be interpreted as a profession of agnosticism or atheism, except by an intentional misreading of their words. In fact, given the difficulty of dispensing with 'existence' language to talk about God, Ismāʿīlīs employed alternative terminologies to speak of God's reality or actuality. Al-Sijistānī, Khusraw, and al-Shahrastānī, after denying the applicability of 'existence' (*aysiyya*, *hastī*, *wujūd*) and non-existence (*laysiyya*, *nāstī*, 'adam) to God, refer to God as the 'existentiator of existence' (*muʿayyis*, *hast-kunanda*, *hast-karda*, *hast-āwaranda*, *mūjid al-wujūd*) using active agentive participles.⁷⁰ As for 'absolute existence/being' (*wujūd muṭlaq*, *hast-i muṭlaq*), this is still inapplicable to God because every existent gradationally participates in 'absolute existence'. Therefore, absolute existence is God's eternal creative act, His Command or Word, which is both the source of all originated existents and reflected within them in various degrees: 'Every particle of the Creation has a share of the Command of God because every creature shares a part of the Command of God through which it has come to be there and by virtue of which it remains in being (*pāyanda buwad*), and the light of the Command of God shines in it.'⁷¹ Absolute existence, which is God's creative act of Command, is not God Himself;

68 al-Sijistānī, *al-Maqālid*, 154.

69 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*, 131.

70 al-Sijistānī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, trans. Herman Landolt in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi, eds., *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, vol. 2, *Ismaili Thought in the Classical Age* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 88–89; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Shish faṣl*, 6–7 (Persian text); al-Shahrastānī, *Struggling*, 10, 48, 49, 51, 76, 86, 87, 89, 90.

71 Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, ed. Henry Corbin (Paris: Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1949), 19; trans. Landolt in Nasr and Aminrazavi, *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, 93.

rather, it is only the trace or effect (*athar*) of God and it is ontologically united with the Universal Intellect. Nevertheless, God's Command qua absolute existence subsumes and encompasses all existents in a state of oneness (*waḥda*).⁷²

Al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī prefer to speak of God in terms of His 'subsistence' (*thubūt*, *thabāt*, *thābit*, *ithbāt*) instead of His 'existence'. Al-Sijistānī argues that God is the 'most subsistent' (*athbat*) of everything that subsists. He speaks of God's 'subsistence' (*thubūt*, *ithbāt*) as the 'real-true subsistence' (*al-ithbāt al-ḥaqīqī*) and created beings as having only 'virtual subsistence' (*al-ithbāt al-majāzī*). Likewise, al-Kirmānī speaks of God as 'subsistent' (*thubūt*) and a 'self-subsistent ipseity' (*huwīyya thābita*).⁷³ Thus, the Ismā'īlīs seem to use *thubūt* for God and creatures in an equivocal manner. It is worth noting that the Ismā'īlī preference to speak of 'subsistence' (*thubūt*, *thabāt*, *ithbāt*; meaning 'standing', 'stability') for God's reality and creaturely subsistence parallels Plotinus's use of the word 'hypostasis' (meaning 'standing under') in an equivocal manner to refer to the One, the Intellect, and other levels of being.⁷⁴ Medieval and modern scholarship on Ismā'īlī theology has thus far failed to register the fact that Ismā'īlī thinkers regularly affirm God's subsistence (*thubūt*, *thabāt*, *thābit*, *ithbāt*)—a finding that also rebuts the polemical charge that Ismā'īlīs professed agnostic or atheist views.

Al-Kirmānī and al-Shahrastānī *do* permit one to use terms like *wujūd* (existence) to speak of God out of verbal necessity to express oneself. But they warned that 'existence' may only be used equivocally such that one is *not* making a real predication concerning God—that He *has existence*, *belongs to* the genus of existence, or (as modern analytics love to say) He *instantiates* the divine nature.⁷⁵ Therefore, Ismā'īlīs *can* say 'God exists' or speak of God as the 'Necessary Existence through Himself' (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihī*) in colloquial or even specialised contexts but this proposition is not a univocal predication about God; rather, it is the affirmation that God is the existentiator (*mūjid*) of existents as explained by al-Shahrastānī: 'He is "existent" (*mawjūd*) in the sense that He existentialises every existence (*mūjid kulli wujūd*), is "Necessary of Existence" in the sense that He necessitates every existent (*mūjib kulli mawjūd*); there is no existentialiser (*mūjid*) for beings other than God (Exalted is He!), the Necessary of Existence in Himself.'⁷⁶ Technically speaking, the Ismā'īlīs use 'existence' (*wujūd*) for God as an equivocal term (*ism mushtarak*). However, 'existence' is not a 'pure equivocal' term—where one word has two wholly unrelated meanings (like the 'bark' of a tree and the 'bark' of a dog). Rather, 'existence' as used by Ismā'īlīs for God is a special kind of equivocal term known to others as an 'impure equivocal', 'paradigmatic equivocal', or 'relative analogical

72 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 27, 84–85.

73 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql*, 152.

74 Wiitala and DiRado, 'Sense'.

75 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql*, 153; al-Shahrastānī, *Struggling*, 43, 48, 55.

76 al-Shahrastānī, *Struggling*, 48, 51.

term'.⁷⁷ Accordingly, the statements 'God exists' and 'trees exist' have different meanings but the meanings are related in some way. In this case, as used by Ismā'īlīs, 'trees exist' means 'trees subsist dependently upon another' while 'God exists' means 'God subsists independently and in reality (*ḥaqīqī*) and He makes everything else subsist dependently and virtually (*majāzī*)'.

The Ismā'īlīs are not the only Muslim philosophical school to deny or at least heavily qualify the applicability of the concept of 'existence' to God. Ibn Sīnā is famous for teaching that God is the Necessary Existence in Himself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihī*) whereas all created beings are contingent existence (*mumkin al-wujūd bi-dhātihī*) in itself or necessary existence due to another (*wājib al-wujūd li-ghayrihi*) because they depend upon God. For Ibn Sīnā, existence (*wujūd*) is not a univocal term, but rather, it is a modulated term (*ism mushakkak*). God, who is existent by virtue of Himself, is 'more deserving' of existence while created beings, who exist by virtue of another, are less worthy of existence. One interpretation of Ibn Sīnā's view of 'existence' is that it is a 'modulated' or 'analogical' term, whose meaning is closer to the univocal predication.⁷⁸ However, recent scholarship by Janos convincingly argues that Ibn Sīnā treats existence as an equivocal term (*ism mushtarak*).⁷⁹ The importance of this finding is that Ibn Sīnā's view of God as the Necessary Existence in Himself and the Ismā'īlī view that God is beyond existence/non-existence do not necessarily conflict and may only differ because of their divergent semantic frameworks. The following is a quote from *al-Ta'liqāt* of Ibn Sīnā (later reproduced by Saḍr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī in his correspondence with Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī), where he admits that God in His reality (*ḥaqīqa*) is not the same as 'existence' (*wujūd*) in general and that the formal definition (*ḥadd*) of God as the Necessary Existence in Himself does not strictly correspond to God's reality (*ḥaqīqa*):

Likewise, we do not know the reality of the First (*ḥaqīqat al-awwal*). We know of Him that existence is necessary for Him or it is not. *This, [however,] is His concomitant not His reality ... His reality is not the same as existence (laysa ḥaqīqatuhu naṣf al-wujūd)*, nor is it a quiddity since the existence with the quiddities is external to their realities while *He in His Essence is the cause of existence (‘illat al-wujūd)*. It is therefore the case that existence enters into defining Him (*taḥdīdihī*) as the genus and differentia enter into the definition of simple substances because of what the intellect requires for them; [*in this case*], *existence is a part of His formal definition*

77 Alexander Treiger, 'Modulation of Existence (*Taṣkīk al-Wuḡūd, Analogia Entis*) and Its Greek and Arabic Sources', in *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion*, ed. Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 332–33.

78 Daniel D. De Haan, 'The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being in Avicenna's *Metaphysics of the Healing*', *The Review of Metaphysics* 69, no. 2 (2015): 276.

79 Damien Janos, 'Avicenna on Equivocity and Modulation: A Reconsideration of the Asmā' Mushakkika (and Tashkīk al-Wujūd)', *Oriens* 50 (2022): 1–62.

(*hadd*) but not *His* reality, just as genus and differentia are parts of the formal definitions of simple substances but not their essences. *Truly for Him, His reality (ḥaqīqa) is beyond existence (fawq al-wujūd)* and existence is among its concomitants.⁸⁰

In the above quotation, Ibn Sinā offers several important concessions with respect to his use of the term *wujūd* for God—concessions that bring Ibn Sinā's views in closer alignment with the Ismā'īlī position that God transcends existence. These remarks suggest that Ibn Sinā only uses the term 'existence' for God as in Necessary Existence in an equivocal manner: God in His *ḥaqīqa* is not an existent, does not possess existence, and actually transcends existence (*fawq al-wujūd*) since He is the source or cause of existence (*'illat al-wujūd*). This appears to vindicate al-Shahrastānī's claims that existence can only be used equivocally for God and that God is truly the source of existence (*mūjjid*) rather than its possessor.⁸¹

7. Ismā'īlī Apophasis and Religious Language: Metonymic Predication

A common concern raised against Ismā'īlī theology and similar views is how the idea of an absolutely simple, wholly transcendent, timeless, and immutable God squares with the religious language about God found in scriptural texts, prayer, and everyday God-talk among Muslims. How does Ismā'īlī apophasis cohere with scriptural and ritual invocations like *bismillāh al-rahmān al-rahīm* (in the name of God, the infinitely compassionate, the most merciful)? How do predicative statements about God found in scripture and prayers—asserting that God is knowing (*'ālim*, *'alīm*), powerful (*qādir*, *qadīr*), most high (*'ālī*), exalted (*a'lā*), the peace (*al-salām*), the sublime (*'azīm*), the sustainer of the worlds (*rabb al-'ālamīn*), the king (*malīk*), or the ever-living subsistent (*al-ḥayy al-qayyūm*)—reconcile with a theology of God transcending all attributes?

First, when approaching religious language about God, one must acknowledge the difference between 'real predication' and 'syntactic predication'. 'Real predication' occurs when a proposition refers to an entitative attribute (an ontological predicate) that the subject (God) possesses. A 'syntactic predication' is only a matter of grammar—where God is the grammatical subject (*mubtada'*) of a sentence that contains a grammatical predicate (*khabar*)—but without the predicate necessarily referring to an entitative or real-distinct ontological feature within God.⁸² As far as the Ismā'īlīs are concerned, positive predications about God are all acceptable so long as they are framed as *syntactic* predications and not as *real* predications. This then raises the question of what these syntactic

80 Ibn Sinā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma, 1973; repr., Beirut: Dār al-Islāmiyya, n.d.), 35 (emphasis added).

81 al-Shahrastānī, *Struggling*, 45, 48, 55, 57, 64.

82 Wiitala and DiRado, 'Sense', 82–83.

predications truly mean and what they are *really* saying about God. Before presenting the Ismāʿīlī interpretation, it is necessary to survey how Muslims of other theological schools interpret the predicative statements found in scripture. For example, take the following statements: ‘God is one’ (*Allāhu aḥad*), ‘God is eternal’ (*Allāhu azalun*), ‘God is knowing’ (*Allāhu ʿālimun*), ‘God is merciful’ (*Allāhu raḥīmun*), and ‘God is a creator’ (*Allāhu khāliqun*). The general principle that Islamic theologians and philosophers adhere to is that the truth value of any syntactic predication (*ḥukm*) about God must be grounded by an underlying reality (*ʿilla*).⁸³

Sunnī theologians, including al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn al-Jawzī, do not read every divine name or *syntactic* predication about God as an affirmation of a *real* divine attribute. Al-Juwaynī says: ‘All of the names of the Sanctified Lord are divided according to whether they signify the Essence or the eternal attributes and what signifies actions or the negation of anything the Sanctified Creator is hallowed above.’⁸⁴ For example, ‘God is eternal’ simply means that God is not temporal; it does not denote an ontological attribute.⁸⁵ ‘God is a creator’ refers to a divine action—the act of creating the world—and does not refer to an entitative divine attribute.⁸⁶ However, ‘God is knowing’ is taken by most Sunnī theologians to mean that ‘God possesses knowledge’ (*Allāhu lahu ʿilmun*) and affirms an uncreated divine attribute. Meanwhile, Sunnī theologians understand God’s mercy (*raḥma*), anger (*ghaḍab*), love (*maḥabba*), guardianship (*wilāya*), and intention (*qaṣd*) as all referring to God’s single attribute of will.⁸⁷ In other words, the Arabic language does not necessitate any particular ontological entailment from a mere syntactic predication: not every syntactic predication about God in Arabic is necessarily a *real* predication about God, nor must it refer to a real-distinct attribute within God.

For their part, Ismāʿīlīs interpret all syntactic predications about God—such as the ninety-nine names of God—either as the negation of creaturely qualities from God or as *metonymic predications*. The latter present God as the source, ground, and bestower of the positive attributes existing within His creation.⁸⁸ Metonymy is a broad category of non-literal speech found across multiple languages including English, Greek, and Arabic. The type of metonymy that Ismāʿīlīs understand in positive divine predications is known in academic literature as ‘meaning transfer’: ‘the process that allows us to use an expression that denotes one property as the name of another property, provided there

83 Richard M. Frank, *Classical Islamic Theology: The Ashʿarites*, ed. Dimitri Gutas (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 768–71.

84 al-Juwaynī, *Guide*, 80.

85 *Ibid.*, 79–80.

86 *Ibid.*

87 *Ibid.*, 80; Frank, *Classical Islamic Theology*, 763–64; Ibn Ḥamdān, *Nihāyat al-mubtadiʿin fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2003), 25.

88 For example, divine names such as the sanctified (*al-quddūs*), the transcendent (*al-mutaʿālī*), the mighty (*al-ʿazīz*), and the one (*al-wāḥid*, *al-aḥad*) are easily interpreted as the negation of attributes from God.

is a salient functional relation between the two'.⁸⁹ Accordingly, Ismā'īlīs interpret all positive divine names and predications as instances of what Rosenthal calls 'productive metonymy'. 'Productive metonymy' is when the statement 'X is F' means 'X is productive of F-things' or 'X produces F-things' instead of meaning 'X has the property of being F' or 'X is an F-thing'.⁹⁰ Plato uses metonymic predication throughout his writings, especially when he discusses the predicates 'healthy' and 'just'; this type of metonymy endures to the present day. People refer to an action or a punishment as 'justice' because it *produces justice* in society or *contributes justice* to a particular situation. Ismā'īlīs interpret all positive divine names in this manner: 'God is X' really means 'God originates X'.

Accordingly, al-Sijistānī interprets the phrase 'God is powerful' (*Allāhu qādirun*) as follows: 'The Creator in His surpassing glory transcends that which can be said to have power; rather it is He Who is the provider of creation's splendid and noble powers'.⁹¹ Thus, 'God is powerful' means God is the bestower of all power upon His creation. Khusraw offers the same interpretation of 'God is powerful' and 'God is the creator': 'They call Him powerful (*qādir*) because all the power (*qudrat*) of the powerful (*qādirūn*) is from Him; likewise, it is He who has given creative power (*khalqat*) to the creators (*khālīqān*)'.⁹² Ismā'īlī philosophers apply a productive metonymic reading to most positive divine names found in scripture and in theology. In the below passages, al-Shahraṣṭānī interprets various divine names from both scripture and positive theology as metonymic predications:

[God] is truth (*ḥaqq*) in the sense that He makes the truth true (*yuhīququ al-ḥaqq*) and He makes the false false (*yubṭilu al-bāṭil*), and He is necessary in His existence (*wājib wujūdihi*) in the sense that He necessitates the existence of other than Him (*yūjibu wujūd ghayrihi*), and annihilates (*yu'dimu*), and He is living (*ḥayy*) in the sense that He gives life (*yuhyī*) and death.⁹³

Majestic is our Lord and He is exalted above being described by perfection (*al-tamām*), exceeding being described by deficiency. Thus, He makes complete whatever is deficient (*mukammil kullī nāqīṣ*). If by 'perfection', it is meant that He makes perfect whatever is perfect (*mutammim kullī tāmm*), this is sound He is 'existent' (*mawjūd*) in the sense that He existentialises every existence (*mūjīd kullī wujūd*), [He] is 'Necessary of Existence' (*wājib al-wujūd*) in the sense that He necessitates

89 G. Nunberg, quoted in Saul Rosenthal, 'Self-Predication and Productive Metonymy', *Apeiron* 51, no. 1 (2008): 21.

90 Ibid., 22–23.

91 Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom: A Study of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī's Kitāb al-Yanābī' Including a Complete English Translation with Commentary and Notes on the Arabic Text*, trans. Paul E. Walker (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 57.

92 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Between Reason and Revelation*, 218, translation modified.

93 al-Shahraṣṭānī, *Struggling*, 43 (English), 41 (Arabic), transliteration added and translation modified.

every existent (*mūjib kullī mawjūd*), [He] is 'knowing' in the sense that He causes whatever is knowing to know (*mu'allim kullī 'ālim*), and [He] is 'powerful' (*qādir*) in the sense that He empowers whatever is powerful (*muqaddir kullī qādir*).⁹⁴

Instead, 'unity' is applied to Him (Exalted is He!) and to existents purely equivocally. He is 'one' (*wāḥidun*) unlike the 'ones' (units) mentioned, [He is] the one (*wāḥidun*) from Whom proceeds [both] the unity (*al-waḥda*) and the multiplicity (*al-kathra*) that are opposites. [He is] one (*wāḥidun*) with the meaning that He existentiates (*yūjīdu*) the 'ones' (*al-aḥād*). He singularizes the oneness (*bi-l-waḥdāniyya*), then He makes it emanate upon His creation.⁹⁵

In the above statements, al-Shahrastānī glosses all *predicative names* of God with the *productive active participles* derived from those predicates: God is the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) insofar that He is the one who makes the truth true (*muḥiqq*); God being called existent (*mawjūd*) and Necessary Existence (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*) means God is the existentiator (*mūjīd*) of every existence and existent and the necessitator (*mūjib*) of every contingent; God is living (*al-ḥayy*) insofar as He is the one who gives life (*muḥyī*) to the living; God is powerful (*al-qādir*) in the sense that He empowers (*muqaddir*) the powerful; He is the knowing (*'ālim*, *'alīm*) insofar as He bestows knowledge (*mu'allim*) to the knowers; God is the one (*al-wāḥid*) in the sense that He gives existence to various units. God is named the perfect (*al-tāmm*) in the sense that God is the perfecter (*mutammim*, *mutimm*) of whatever is perfect (*al-tāmm*); God is called the complete (*al-kāmil*) only insofar as He is the completer (*mukammil*) of whatever is complete (*kāmil*). This interpretation allows the Ismā'īlī philosophers to *accept syntactic predications* about God while also denying all *real predications* about God. God is exalted above all real predications and is identified as the bestower of all real predicates and powers that He is verbally attributed with.

Ultimately, the truth-maker or underlying ground (*'illa*) for God being attributed with numerous positive predicates in scripture is the fact that God is the bestower, originator, and creator all of the powers and attributes that these predicates refer to. This means that all positive divine names and predicates are ultimately reducible to God's eternal act of originating and sustaining His creation. The Ismā'īlīs refer to God's singular creative act of eternal creation as God's Command (*amr Allāh*). Accordingly, al-Sijistānī explains that all positive predications about God found in scripture refer to God's Command: 'The predication (*al-inniyya*) that is ascribed to God, may He be praised, is the pure origination (*al-ibdā' al-maḥd*) that is His Command (*amruhu*) and His goodness (*jūduhu*).'⁹⁶ In other words, various divine predications found in the Qur'an, which often begin with the *inna*

94 Ibid., 48 (English), 50–51 (Arabic), transliteration added and translation modified.

95 Ibid., 56 (English), 62 (Arabic), transliteration added and translation modified.

96 al-Sijistānī, *al-Maqālīd*, 56.

particle, are only true in virtue of God's creative act of Command from which various attributes flow into His creation: 'The attribution of predication (*idāfat al-inniyya*) to Him means that it is He who originated the substances which are the secondary causes of the manifestation of God's blessings and favours.'⁹⁷ Likewise, Tūsī explains that the positive predicates that people attribute to God are grounded by His creative command: 'The fact that in relation to Him [God] people speak of Necessity, Unity, Simplicity, Will, Knowledge and Power, and likewise of [His] other attributes, is all because His exalted Command is one pure light, one uncontaminated emanation, one bounty and one generosity.'⁹⁸

When God, who transcends all positive and negative attributes, is the originator of the various perfections that the divine names and predicates describe, it follows that within God's creation, there must also exist concrete originated beings who *literally* possess perfect created attributes described by *real predications*. In the Ismā'īlī Neoplatonic worldview—which the Ismā'īlī philosophers established through cosmological arguments—the first and highest creation of God is the Universal Intellect (First Intellect), and the second creation is the Universal Soul. When God is understood as the ground, source, and bestower of the various perfections (life, power, knowledge, etc.)—which are inapplicable to Him as real predications—it logically follows that the First Intellect and Universal Soul are the locus of these perfect attributes and various *real predications* apply to them. Ismā'īlī philosophers consistently describe the First Intellect as the subject of positive divine names insofar as the divine names are predicative and descriptive. According to al-Kirmānī, the First Intellect is 'entirely living, entirely powerful, entirely knowing, entirely eternal, entirely all-encompassing, entirely perfect, complete, and singular. He is the first existent, the real, and the originated being ... He is a singular essence to which these attributes are connected—some of which are due to his essence and some of which are due to his relationships with other things.'⁹⁹ In Ismā'īlī writings, the First Intellect is predicated with various divine names and predicates: the living (*al-ḥayy*), the knowing (*al-ʿālim*, *al-ʿalīm*), the powerful (*al-qādir*), the perfect (*al-kāmil*), the one (*al-wāḥid*), the lord of lords (*rabb al-arbāb*), the first, the last, the manifest, the hidden (*al-awwal*, *al-ākhir*, *al-ẓāhir*, *al-bāṭin*), and so on.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, the Universal Soul as the second creation is also described by certain divine names: the lord-sustainer (*rabb, parwardigār, khudāwand*) of human souls, the sublime (*al-ʿazīm*), the creator (*al-khāliq*) and the maker (*al-ṣāniʿ*) of the physical world, the enduring (*al-bāqī*), and the generous

⁹⁷ Ibid., 58.

⁹⁸ Naṣīr al-Dīn Tūsī, *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought*, trans. S. J. Badakhchani (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 19.

⁹⁹ al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*, 188–89.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Shish faṣl*, 39, 43, 46. See also Khalil Andani, 'Neoplatonic Prayer: The Isma'īlī Hermeneutics of Ṣalāt according to al-Sijistānī and Nāṣir-i Khusraw', in *Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation: Texts and Studies in Honor of William C. Chittick and Sachiko Murata*, ed. Mohammed Rustom (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 277–97.

(*al-ikrām*).¹⁰¹ Al-Sijistānī explains that the First Intellect and Universal Soul may be called 'lord' (*rabb*) in the virtual sense (*bi-majāz*) because they provide spiritual nourishment to the spiritual and physical creatures below them.¹⁰²

Even the name *Allāh*, insofar as this divine name is taken as descriptive attribute or real predication, properly refers to and describes the First Intellect and, in certain contexts, refers to the Universal Soul. According to al-Kirmānī, the name *Allāh* derives from *waliha* (to bewilder); the First Intellect, as the first created being, cannot encompass God and is in a state of bewilderment (*ḥayra*) in the face of God's absolute transcendence.¹⁰³ This is why the name *Allāh* describes the First Intellect. However, it should be noted that Ismā'īlīs commonly use *Allāh* as a nominal name for God Himself. The various invocations of *Allāh* in scripture and prayer are assumed to refer to God, but everything positively predicated of God is understood metonymically. The linguistic and scriptural basis for attributing various divine names to the First Intellect and Universal Soul is a form of metonymic speech known to Arabic grammarians as 'cognitive transference' (*majāz 'aqlī*). *Majāz 'aqlī* is a kind of non-literal speech in which a predicate (action or attribute) is syntactically assigned to an entity who is not the real doer of it but who is contiguously related to its real doer. For example, when a king commands a palace to be built, people will say that 'the king built the palace'. However, the king did not literally build the palace; his servants built the palace under king's command. The phrase 'the king built the palace' is a metonymic predication involving *majāz 'aqlī* because the attribute of 'building' is transferred from the servants of the king to the king himself.¹⁰⁴ Examples of *majāz 'aqlī* are found throughout the Qur'an: one verse says God takes souls at death (Q. 39:42) but another verse says the Angel of Death takes souls at death (Q. 32:11); one verse says that God split the sea for the people of Moses (Q. 2:50) but two other verses say that Moses split the sea (Q. 20:77, 26:63); when the Prophet receives the people's offerings (Q. 9:103), it is immediately stated that God receives their offerings (Q. 9:104). Some Sunnis interpret the *ḥadīth* about God's descent to the lowest heaven as describing His angels' descent.¹⁰⁵ In these examples (among many others), the Qur'an ascribes acts or attributes to God which are concretely executed or manifested by His creatures.

Al-Kirmānī employs *majāz 'aqlī* to articulate why God is called one (*al-wāḥid*), knowing (*al-ʿālim*), or powerful (*al-qādir*) even though these attributes properly belong to His creatures:

101 See, for example, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Shish faṣl*, 31–32; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 27, 108.

102 al-Sijistānī, *al-Maqāṭid*, 63.

103 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*, 194, as explained in Mansouri, 'Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī', 205–6.

104 Abdul Gabbar Mohammed Al-Sharafi, *Textual Metonymy: A Semiotic Approach* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 28–31, 177–78.

105 al-Juwaynī, *Guide*, 89.

When it is said that God is one (*wāḥid*), knowing (*‘ālim*), powerful (*qādir*), etc., it does not mean that He possesses oneness (*waḥda*), knowledge (*‘ilm*), power (*qudra*) and life (*ḥayāt*) with which He has been attributed. Rather, it means that He is the agent (*fā‘il*) of the one, knowing, living, powerful, etc., just as a king who has built a certain city, or has struck the neck of a certain person is called a ‘builder’ and a ‘striker’. But these are not his personal attributes in the sense that he [the king] personally executed these (actions). Rather, these are the attributes of the one whom he commanded and enabled to do so—he [who] personally built and dealt the blow and by his [the king’s] command became a builder and striker. But everything is ascribed to the king—for it is due to his command that the building and the striking took place.¹⁰⁶

In the view of al-Kirmānī and other Ismā‘īlī philosophers, the divine names ‘one’, ‘knowing’, ‘powerful’, and ‘living’ understood as *real predications* describe the First Intellect—the first and greatest creation of God. However, Muslim scriptural texts and prayers still refer to God by these names because God is the originator of the First Intellect; the First Intellect depends entirely upon God and it acts only according to God’s command. Therefore, the attributes of the First Intellect—its life, knowledge, power, perfections, etc.—are metonymically predicated to God in colloquial and scriptural speech. In the same vein, Khusraw holds that the divine names of the ‘creator’ (*khālīq*, *āfarīda*) and ‘sovereign’ (*malik*, *pādshāh*) apply to the Universal Soul and the Universal Intellect, respectively. However, Khusraw observes that God is still called the creator and the sovereign in scriptural and colloquial contexts:

Thus, the Sovereign in a true sense is the First, that is, the First Originated Being (*mubda‘-i awwal*) with which the Divine Command immediately became one, and that is the First Intellect (*‘aql-i awwal*), which is complete in both actuality and potentiality. The Creator and agent [of creation] in reality is the Universal Soul (*naḥs-i kull*) which, in relation to the Universal Intellect (*‘aql-i kull*), namely the First Intellect, is like a thought of the rational soul. Thus, the Creator and creation, the Sovereign and sovereignty, are all in the Divine Command which has no connection with God’s ipseity.¹⁰⁷

The attribution of creatorship and sovereignty made to God is not because He is the Creator and Sovereign, but in the sense that the existence of the Creator and Sovereign is from His Command, and all existents are attributed to Him in order to

106 al-Kirmānī, quoted in Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, ‘The Concept of *Tawḥīd* in the Thought of Ḥamid al-Dīn al-Kirmānī’ (PhD diss., McGill University, 1986), 139.

107 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 27.

glorify Him—just as when a man commands others to build a mansion, it is built by carpenters and other workmen, yet it is not said that they made it but that this mansion was built by so-and-so, whereas he did no work except to command.¹⁰⁸

The remarks of al-Kirmānī and Khusraw allow Ismāʿīlīs to affirm and even use positive divine predications about God while continuing to understand them as metonymic predications. Both authors read divine predications found in scripture as ‘cognitive transference’ (*majāz ʿaqlī*) and evoke the example of a king being attributed with actions that he commanded his servants to perform. This interpretative strategy effectively allows Ismāʿīlī philosophers to uphold their radical apophatic theology of God transcending all real predications; affirming the Universal Intellect and Soul as the bearers of any real predications signified by the divine names; and affirm the syntactic predications about God found in scripture and other religious contexts through interpreting them as metonymic predications.

Ismāʿīlī thinkers employ similar methods to account for the anthropomorphic scriptural descriptions of God—such as God’s face, two hands, two eyes, and so on. While rejecting a literalist interpretation of these attributes, Ismāʿīlī thinkers take seriously the argument that the ‘face of God’ (*wajh Allāh*) and ‘hand of God’ (*yad Allāh*) must refer to extramental realities (*ḥaqāʾiq*) and cannot be explained away as mere allegories. Al-Sijistānī observes that God’s creation consists of hierarchical ranks (*ḥudūd*) through which God’s creative action flows according to a cosmic arrangement (*tartīb*) and the so-called organs of God mentioned in revelatory scripture refer to these ranks. The ‘face of God’ (*wajh Allāh*) signifies the First Intellect because ‘he is the face of whatever the Originator manifested within him among the forms of all things and by which one distinguishes between each of the forms, and to which one turns for the recognition of the Originator’.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, the ‘two eyes’ (*ʿaynān*) of God refer to the Universal Soul. The role of the physical eyes in perceiving shapes and distinguishing corporeal forms indicates the fact that the Universal Soul perceives spiritual forms and distinguishes between spiritual and corporeal shapes. The ‘twoness’ of the eyes alludes to the role of the Universal Soul as the spiritual intermediary between two levels—the Intellect and Nature—since the Soul directs ‘one eye’ towards the Intellect and directs ‘one eye’ towards the physical world.¹¹⁰ The ‘two hands’ (*al-yadān*) of God that are ‘spread out’ refer to the Prophet and his Legatee (the Imām), known as the ‘two founders’ (*al-asāsān*), because they spread forth the divine law and expound its spiritual interpretation (*taʾwīl*) on behalf of God.¹¹¹ Al-Sijistānī also refers to famous anthropomorphic *ḥadīths* circulating among

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 29.

¹⁰⁹ al-Sijistānī, *al-Maqālīd*, 104.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 105.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 106.

the Ḥanbalīs—such as the tradition in which the Prophet says, ‘I saw my Lord in the form of a young man, beardless with short, curly hair.’ This tradition was authenticated by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) and his followers, including Ibn Taymiyya, who affirm its contents according to its apparent meaning.¹¹² However, al-Sijistānī argues that the Prophet’s ‘lord’ (*rabb*) mentioned here cannot refer to God, who transcends all physical and spiritual attributes. Rather, the ‘lord’ whom Muḥammad saw in the form of a young man was a divinely guided human being who served as the spiritual instructor (*murabbī*) of the Prophet: ‘The [person] who undertook the spiritual training (*tarbiya*) of Muḥammad, peace be upon him and his progeny, until he promoted him to the elevated ranks, was his “lord” to whom he referred and from whom he learned.’¹¹³ In Ismā‘īlī thought, the Prophet’s spiritual initiator and ‘lord’ was none other than Imām Abū Ṭālib, who was the last divinely appointed Imām in the cycle of Jesus.¹¹⁴

8. Conclusion: The Rational and Scriptural Coherence of Ismā‘īlī *Tawḥīd*

This paper has attempted to offer a philosophical exposition of the Ismā‘īlī Muslim concept of *tawḥīd* and illuminate its logical structure against certain distorted portrayals in medieval polemic and modern scholarship. While the examples cited were drawn from medieval Ismā‘īlī philosophy, the general apophatic and Neoplatonic tenor of Ismā‘īlī theology prevails well into modern times. The contemporary Nizārī Ismā‘īlī Imāmate, as seen in the teachings of Imām Ḥasan ‘Alī Shāh Aga Khan I (d. 1881), Shihāb al-Dīn Shāh (d. 1884), and Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Aga Khan IV, continues to promote an apophatic theology of *tawḥīd* and Neoplatonic structure of creation.¹¹⁵

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- 112 On this *ḥadīth* and its reception in Ḥanbalī circles, see Wesley Williams, ‘Aspects of the Creed of Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal: A Study of Anthropomorphism in Early Islamic Discourse’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002): 441–63.
- 113 al-Sijistānī, *al-Maqālīd*, 64.
- 114 On the status of Abū Ṭālib as an Imām in Ismā‘īlī thought, see Khalil Andani, ‘Metaphysics of Muhammad’, *Journal of Sufi Studies* 8 (2019): 115–16n29.
- 115 See Muhammad Hasan al-Husayni, *The First Aga Khan* (London: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2018); Shihab al-Din ibn ‘Alī Shah (Khalil Allah), *Kitāb-i khitābat-i ‘Alīyyah: dar masa’il akhlaq va’qa’id-i Isma‘īliyah* (Bombay: Ismaili Society, 1963; Aga Khan IV, unpublished *firman*s made in 1983 Silver Jubilee Visits and *Bayt al-Khayal firman*s).

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Visions of *Tawḥīd*: Reconciling a Statement in the Twenty-Eighth Supplication of *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*

Zoheir Esmail

1. Introduction

A child brought up in a traditional Shīʿī household would typically start to interact with theological doctrines in terms of numbers. One God, 14,000 prophets, 5 prophets to whom a divine book or scroll was revealed (the *ulū l-ʿazm* prophets), 14 infallibles (the Prophet, his daughter Fāṭima, and the Imāms), and 12 Imāms. Islam's central and foundational thesis concerning the very nature of God is often explained with reference to arithmetic understandings of polytheism and the Trinity as opposed to more philosophically challenging explanations. While others may believe in many gods, Muslims believe in the numerically one true God and as such the *shahāda* states that there is no god but God, understood in arithmetic terms. The very foundation of Islam and one of its defining statements is therefore interpreted as a stance on number. A typical argument against belief in the Trinity would be that three cannot be tantamount to one numerically, rendering the Trinity arithmetically nonsensical. Or, using this particular framing, one cannot equal not one, as that violates the law of non-contradiction, making the Trinity fundamentally illogical. Such reasoning often occurs in a vacuum without investigation into the intricacies of the Trinity propounded by the Christian scholastic tradition.¹ But the problematic argument from arithmetic in debating the Trinity also applies to the use of numbers to explain *tawḥīd*, according to plentiful statements from the Imāms which negate the meaning of numerical oneness when conceiving of how God is One.² Statements such as 'The One not meaning numerically' (*al-Wāhid bi-lā taʿwīl ʿadad*),³ or 'One not numerically' (*Wāhid lā bi-ʿadad*)⁴ are clear in their rejection of an arithmetic understanding of *tawḥīd*. The clarity of these statements, on the one hand, and the rational conceptions of God as an unlimited Being, on the other, resulted in a framing of *tawḥīd* that found numerical oneness problematic. As such, the statement 'You have, O my God, numerical oneness' narrated in a supplication attributed to the fourth Shīʿī Imām, ʿAlī b. Ḥusayn (also re-

1 For an overview of some important discussions concerning the Trinity, as well as contributions of Trinitarian conceptions beyond the European context, see Peter C. Phan, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

2 ʿAlī Khān al-Madani, *Riṭāʿ al-sālikīn fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīfat Sayyid al-Sajjādīn*, 7 vols. (Qom: Jāmiʿat al-Mudarrisīn, 2006), 4:294.

3 Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 15 vols. (Qom: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2008), 1:341.

4 Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha* (Qom: al-Hijra, 1993), 269.

ferred to by his epithets Zayn al-‘Ābidīn and al-Sajjād), needed an interpretation other than an attestation to numerical oneness. At the same time, traditional commentators were hesitant to draw attention to any weakness in the attribution of such a statement to Imām al-Sajjād and opted to work with it rather than reject its attribution outright.⁵

In this paper I will begin by explaining the problem with an arithmetic understanding of *tawḥīd* and its tension with clear conceptions about the nature of God in scriptural sources, such as God not having a partner, limitation, or similitude. Numerical oneness in some cases simply allows for a possibility of one of these unacceptable conceptions (like in the case of classifying God in one of the five universals such as a genus in relation to a species, where divinity is one in genus, indirectly allowing for more than one species of god) and in other cases directly implies it (like the limited nature of anything within the realm of numbers). I will then explain the views presented by Sayyid Shubbar (1188–1242/1774–1826) in his *Maṣābiḥ al-anwār* with reference to some of the commentaries that preceded his work. A more intricate reconciliation in Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Mūsawī al-Ḥusaynī’s *Lawāmi‘ al-anwār* is considered thereafter, showing the development of the exegetical literature and its reliance on the theoretical mysticism of the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī and the transcendental philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā in coherently reconciling visions of *tawḥīd* beyond numerical oneness and the arguments directly understood from certain scriptural sources. Whilst Shubbar’s *Maṣābiḥ* usefully summarises, interprets, and evaluates the existing opinions in a work tackling enigmatic *ḥadīth*, al-Ḥusaynī’s *Lawāmi‘* is perhaps the most important, seminal, and detailed extant commentary of *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya* and so understanding the development of its content indicates the progression in the acceptance and incorporation of certain mystical visions of *tawḥīd* among mainstream Shī‘ī scholars.

2. The Problem with Numerical Oneness

In a detailed *ḥadīth* attributed to Imām ‘Alī, he explains the conceptions of *tawḥīd* that can be applicable to God and those that cannot. It is narrated in the *Book of Tawḥīd* by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq that on the day of the Battle of the Camel a Bedouin approached Imām ‘Alī and asked him if he believed that God was One. On hearing this question those who were there reproached the Bedouin for asking such a seemingly basic question at such a difficult time. However, Imām ‘Alī told them to leave the Bedouin alone, as what he wanted is what the Imām wanted from the people they were fighting. This statement attributed to the Imām, if considered authentic, may show that the concept of *tawḥīd*

5 This can be contrasted to other reconciliations where a problematic statement could be set aside on the basis of chain criticism; see, for example, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā’s reconciliation of the problem of truly seeing the Prophet in a dream with historical figures that are disparaged in the Shī‘ī worldview as a sign of their spiritual station. ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *Rasā’il al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā*, 4 vols. (Qom: Manshūrāt Dār al-Qur’ān al-Karīm, 1984), 2:12–13.

was perhaps elusive even to early Muslims as the Battle of the Camel was the first major civil war among Muslims. If the attribution is not considered authentic it shows a vision of how Shīʿī protagonists may have conceived of some of the sources of fundamental tension among the early community. The narration continues with the Imām proceeding to answer the Bedouin's question with the following response:

O Bedouin! There are four ways of saying that God is One, two of which are not attributable to God, and two that are established. The two that are not permitted concerning Him are if someone says '[He is] one', meaning numerically. This is not applicable, as what does not have a second is not included in the category of numbers. Do you not see how God considers someone who says He is 'the third of three'⁶ an unbeliever?

[Secondly,] for someone to say that 'He is one [like one] human', meaning a species from a genus, this is not permitted as it is attributing a likeness [to Him] and our Lord is too majestic and exalted above that.

As for the two aspects that are affirmed for Him, [the first] is for one to say, 'He is Singular, and there is nothing similar to Him,' such is our Lord, Mighty and Majestic.

And [secondly] if one says, 'He, the Mighty and Majestic, is unique,' meaning He is not divisible in His existence, or by the intellect or in our imagination, such is our Lord, Mighty and Majestic.⁷

This tradition has particularly rich philosophical import. While some may argue that the technical terms used such as genus and species may reduce the likelihood of a sound attribution to the Imām,⁸ this tradition was used throughout the commentaries investigated dealing with the statement in supplication twenty-eight entitled 'His supplication in fleeing to God' in which the statement "You have, O my God, numerical oneness" occurs. Its importance in forming arguments for the nature of *tawhīd* in this context is therefore indicated by its widespread use. Interestingly, the argument provided for God not being numerically one from the Qur'an as not being 'the third of three' may be traced to an argument against a conception of the Trinity according to Monophysites.⁹

6 Q. 5:73.

7 Muḥammad b. 'Alī Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawhīd* (Qom: Jāmi'at al-Mudarrisin, 1977), 83.

8 See Muḥammad Aṣif Muḥsinī, *Mashra'at Biḥār al-anwār*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'Ārif li-l-Maṭbū'āt, 2005), 1:108. While arguments can be made for the non-technical use of the terms or the transmission of the contents with technical terms from a later period in line with the permission to transmit *ḥadīth* by meaning rather than letter, such arguments are unlikely to satisfy critics of the occurrence of complex philosophical explanations in public discourse before the translation movement.

9 See C. Jonn Block, 'Philoponian Monophysitism in South Arabia at the Advent of Islam with Implications for the English Translation of "*Thalātha*"', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 23, no. 1 (2012): 50–75. Monophysite belief resulted in the worship of three distinct entities. See also Mun'im Sirry, *Scriptural Polemics: The*

But the reference to a certain conception of the Trinity expressed in the tradition does not directly address a perceived numerical inconsistency of one nature and three persons or the tritheism attributed to Monophysites. Rather, it is the inclusion of God in *any* discussion of numbers at all. He is not one numerically as there is no possibility of a second. A second what? A second god? A second independent existent? The use of the word 'second' without an indication of what that second is may indicate the impossibility of any real independent existent other than Him.

What exactly does such an idea entail? Central to the discussion of *tawhīd* is the reconciliation of sheer unity with the multiplicity we intuitively experience. Objects instinctively seem separate, differentiated, and independent from each other. A glass seems separate, different, and independent from a stone, car, or pen and we do not require any complex argumentation to establish this as our intuitive grasp of the relationship between these objects. Without dismissing the intuitive experience of multiplicity as an illusion of the uninitiated or affirming real multiplicity at the expense of rejecting real unity, understanding how unity and multiplicity can be conceived together is a question at the heart of mystical and philosophical discussions.¹⁰ In his exegetical work *Bayān al-sa'āda*, Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh when explaining the verse of 'the third of three' draws on the mystical tradition to explain that the conception of numerical oneness as it pertains to God stems from not being able to think past the realm of multiplicity and the physical to a more refined conception of God being a single reality by which all contingent beings are self-disclosed in their loci of manifestation. Hidden yet manifest in every locus of manifestation. He further goes on to explain that the reason for rejecting the claim of numerical oneness as a conception of *tawhīd* is that it entails limitation (*taḥdīd*) and similitude (*tamaththul*).¹¹ Both of these are unacceptable outcomes which contradict the vision of *tawhīd* in the scriptural sources in general, and the tradition above specifically.

Limitation is a key dilemma when subscribing to numerical oneness. In order for something to fall into the realm of numbers it must be limited, as before that, there is no number that can be determined for that thing. Something unbounded cannot be said to be arithmetically one as that itself would entail a boundary by which other than it can also be differentiated from it. An unlimited reality cannot be limited such that a numerical status can be given to it as that would involve an essential contradiction

Qur'an and Other Religions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 154–65. While reconciling positive references in Q. 5:73, al-Dimashqī recognises the plurality of Christian belief and practice; see Rifaat Y. Ebied and David Thomas, eds., *Muslim–Christian Polemic during the Crusades: A Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī's Response* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 285–87.

10 This question is addressed in transcendental philosophy in the discussion of the modulation of existence; see Sajjad H. Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being* (London: Routledge, 2009); Abd al-Rassul Obudiyat, *An Introduction to Islamic Philosophy Based on the Works of Murtada Mutahhari*, trans. Hussein Valeh (London: MIU Press, 2012) 43–51.

11 Sulṭān Muḥammad b. Ḥaydar Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh, *Bayān al-sa'āda fī maqāmāt al-'ibāda*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li-l-Maṭbū'āt, 1988), 2:105.

(limiting the essentially unlimited); similar to the concept of infinity, which is denoted by a symbol rather than a number, as there is no single number that can be attributed to an unlimited value. To say infinity plus one is nonsensical as in order for infinity to enter the realm of numbers we must first limit it and then designate a number for it and by that process it is no longer infinite. Once something is limited it is similar to other limited beings at least in terms of the fact that it has limits. But this is also problematic in relation to the vision of God in the scriptural sources as ‘There is nothing like unto Him’ (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay*)¹² and also what is meant by a numerical understanding of *tawhīd* resulting in similitude.

The issue of similitude is alluded to as the other unattributable conception of God in Imām ‘Alī’s answer to the Bedouin’s question in the tradition above. The reasoning provided in the tradition is from the perspective of genus and species, meaning that God cannot be one from among a genus of gods such that it entails the possibility of a similar being under the same genus, even if that other god does not actually exist at all. God is not one existent god from a genus of hypothetically possible gods. His existence is unlike a unique Rolex watch, which falls under a genus of unique watches, but allows for the possibility of other unique watches, even if they haven’t been made yet. Rather, He doesn’t fall under even a hypothetical genus as this would entail the possibility of similitude. This is why He is beyond a partner, as nothing falls under the same genus as Him. This notion is different to Him not actually having a partner despite the possibility. He *cannot* have a partner as nothing is conceived as sharing a genus with Him. A vision of God that allows for this possibility is inconsistent with the vision of *tawhīd* explained in this tradition.

The conception of God as not having any similitude, then, constitutes one of the acceptable visions of *tawhīd* in the *ḥadīth* above without any further explanation, as it is the inverse outcome from the dilemma of similitude already explained in the tradition. The second conception that is acceptable refers to simplicity (*basāṭa*) as opposed to composition (*tarkīb*). Most physical phenomena can be further reduced into constituent parts. Humans, giraffes, trees, and stones can all be split into smaller parts. When we cannot physically reduce something beyond its constituent parts, we can continue imaginatively, and when we cannot continue imaginatively, we can invoke an intellectual principle that anything that has dimensions can be split into something with smaller dimensions. No matter how small those dimensions become, there is still a theoretical possibility of splitting it further as number allows us to conceive of a number between two numbers. It is corporealisation in a body that allows for infinite splitting and composition. Some sensory phenomena such as prime colours are traditionally thought to be simple, meaning that they are not split into parts, although they may be graded on a spectrum. However, defined light particles would not be subject to the same simplicity.

12 Q. 42:11.

God is a Being beyond any limitation and that includes being limited by matter or having a body. This means that He cannot have the limitations of matter and so cannot be composite or be split physically, imaginatively, or conceptually as all of these methods require defined boundaries. Since He cannot be limited, He also cannot be divided in any way. In the same way that it is impossible to actually, imaginatively, or conceptually divide infinity, God, the only unlimited Being, cannot be split into parts in any way at all.

The arguments for both acceptable and unacceptable visions of *tawḥīd* revolve around limiting God in any way. When something constitutes a limitation, that results in a vision of *tawḥīd* which is unacceptable. Conversely, the implications of an unlimited God, such as His having no similitude or the impossibility of division, are deemed acceptable visions. Limited and unlimited are contradictories and so as the law of non-contradiction dictates something cannot be limited and unlimited at the same time from the same perspective, nor can that being be neither limited or unlimited at the same time from the same perspective. How, then, can we reconcile the outward meaning of the expression found in the twenty-eighth supplication of *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, 'You have, O my God, numerical oneness' (*laka yā ilāhī waḥdāniyyat al-ʿadad*)? The statement's outward commitment to numerical oneness would contradict the vision of an unlimited, indivisible, unique God. It is to this question that Sayyid ʿAbdullāh Shubbar devotes a section in his *Maṣābiḥ al-anwār fī ḥall mushkilāt al-akḥbār*.

3. Reconciliations in *Maṣābiḥ al-anwār*

Sayyid ʿAbdullāh b. Muḥammad Riḍā Shubbar (1188–1242/1774–1826) was a prolific polymath from a family of scholars who traced their lineage back to the fourth Imām of the Twelver Shīʿis, Imām ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn.¹³ Sayyid Muḥammad Maʿsūm wrote a biography of Sayyid ʿAbdullāh Shubbar in which he narrates that he was known as 'the son of an answered prayer' due to the divine response to the prayer of his father for rain during a period of drought.¹⁴ Born in Najaf, Sayyid ʿAbdullāh accompanied his father to Kāẓimiyya where he began his studies in the introductory sciences, continuing until he received his licence of *ijtihād* from Shaykh Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ.¹⁵ He spent the rest of his life teaching and wrote around seventy books on a variety of topics in the fields of jurisprudence, Qurʾānic exegesis, theology, ethics, and *ḥadīth*.¹⁶ In his time he was known as the second Majlisī due to the impressive extent of his writings.¹⁷ He is buried

¹³ Jaʿfar al-Muhājir, *Aʿlām al-shīʿa*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Muʿarrikh al-ʿArabī, 2010), 2:868.

¹⁴ ʿAbdullāh Shubbar, *Maṣābiḥ al-anwār fī ḥall mushkilāt al-akḥbār*, 2 vols. (Qom: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2010), 1:17. There is a categorised list of Sayyid ʿAbdullāh's known works on pages 12–15.

¹⁵ al-Muhājir, *Aʿlām*, 2:869.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ The first Majlisī in this context presumably being Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, the author of *Biḥār al-anwār*; see Muḥsin al-Amin, *Aʿyān al-shīʿa*, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Taʿāruf li-l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1985), 8:82.

in the shrine of Imām al-Kāẓim and Imām al-Taqī in Kāẓimiyya.¹⁸

In his *Maṣābīḥ al-anwār* Sayyid Shubbar begins by elucidating the problem of numerical oneness and its unacceptability according to the scriptural sources and thereafter presents eight views on how the apparent inconsistency found in the expression of Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn in the twenty-eighth supplication of *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya* can be reconciled. These views are garnered from a selection of commentaries on the *Ṣaḥīfa*, which predate the *Maṣābīḥ* but attempted to explain the statement with a view to reconciling the issue in some way. Other commentators such as Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya (d. 1400/1979) do not tackle the apparent contradiction directly when explaining this phrase, but rather use the mention of oneness as an opportunity to explain an accepted vision of *tawḥīd*. In his *Fī ṣilāl al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya* he quotes a meaning of oneness from Mullā Ṣadrā's *Aṣfār* which continues to explain that attributing oneness to God is a form of aggrandisement whereas oneness in relation to creation is reduction.¹⁹ Table 1 summarises the views collected by Sayyid Shubbar and elucidates what seem to be the key reconciliations available to him at the time he wrote his work.

TABLE 1: A summary of the views found in *Maṣābīḥ al-anwār* on how to reconcile the statement ‘You have, O my God, numerical oneness’ with non-numerical oneness

View number	Purport of the view	Restatement of the phrase
1	God is not within the realm of numbers but is rather described by uniqueness and the mention of numbers in the phrase is to deflect any imagination that <i>tawḥīd</i> is numerical. Rather, the word oneness has a meaning which is numerical and another completely different meaning as it pertains to God. ²⁰	You have, O my God, nothing numerical except uniqueness!
2	Uniqueness (<i>waḥdāniyya</i>) is not singularity (<i>wāḥidiyya</i>) and only God is described with uniqueness while created beings can be described with singularity. ²¹	You have, O my God, uniqueness as a separate category from number in creation!
3	God has no partner or second. ²²	From the genus of numbers, You, O my God, are one!

18 Ibid.
19 Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya, *Fī ṣilāl al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya* (Qom: Mu’assasat Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, 2007), 371.
20 Shubbar, *Maṣābīḥ*, 1:246–47. This is the first part of view 2 in Sayyid Shubbar’s discussion. View 2 is split into two different views, and view 1 I have included with view 4 due to its similar purport.
21 Ibid., 247.
22 Ibid.

4	He has created numbers, which exist because of Him. Since He created them, they are not Him and so the statement denies numerical oneness as an attribute of God. ²³ This can also be explained by saying that numerical oneness is the shadow of true Oneness and so the <i>lām</i> in <i>laka</i> is similar to its possessive use in a verse like Q. 2:255. ²⁴	You have, O my God, created numerical oneness and so it belongs to You!
5	The <i>yā'</i> in <i>waḥdāniyya</i> is <i>yā' al-nisba</i> ²⁵ meaning that the type of oneness used here is specifically for Him and not applicable to anything else as everything has a second except for Him. ²⁶	You have, O my God, a specific type of oneness only applicable to You!
6	The reality of numerical oneness is only applicable to God as He is the only one who can really be called One. When we call anything else one it is metaphorical. ²⁷	You have, O my God, real numerical oneness!
7	An intertextual analysis by Sayyid 'Alī Khān (the only author Sayyid Shubbar mentions in this section). This phrase, as well as the rest of the paragraph in which it occurs, are explained by statements that appear in the next part of the supplication. The phrase that specifically relates to 'You have, O my God, numerical oneness' is 'Everyone other than Thee is ... diverse in states, constantly changing in attributes'. The meaning of the statement is therefore in opposition to changing states and attributes in the establishment of unity that is among His Attributes which themselves are considered multiple not in their reality but conceptually. The Names therefore do not entail multiplicity or differential aspects, but rather they are all unified in His Essence. ²⁸	You have, O my God, oneness not associated with changing states and diverse attributes!
8	The Arabic meaning of ' <i>adad</i> can also be essence. ²⁹	You have, O my God, oneness of Essence!

Sayyid Shubbar is silent on most of the views allowing the reader to reconcile the statement to any one or number of the views presented. The only view he comments on is view 8, which he identifies as a weak argument. This is probably due to the tenuous linguistic

23 Ibid., 246. This is the first view presented by Sayyid Shubbar but I have included it in the fourth view as both explanations present the case of numerical oneness being something created.

24 Ibid., 247. The part of Q. 2:255 which is referred to in this view reads: 'to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth'; the use of the *lām* in *lahu* indicating possession.

25 Like the *yā'* in the word *Qurashī* indicating an attribution to the tribe of Quraysh.

26 Shubbar, *Maṣābiḥ*, 1:247.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 248–49.

29 Ibid., 249.

connection made to essence in the context of the statement. View 3 is another weaker argument as it does not address the dilemma of attributing numerical oneness to God nor discuss any way the attribution could be reconciled. Rather, as a simple restatement of accepted concepts within scripture it avoids rationalisation. Commentators generally used a mix of the remaining views in their reconciliations. Of these views, 4, 5, and 6 were the most common. View 1 proposes that the reason for the word ‘numerical’ in the statement is to draw attention to the Oneness of God not being numerical and while it is not identified as a weak argument by Sayyid Shubbar it does seem to be counterintuitive. It would suggest that the outward expression does not mean what it says but rather the opposite—a convenient solution for whenever it needs to be drawn upon! However, such an interpretation conflicts with the accepted conventions of traditional interpretation in not departing from the apparent meaning to its opposite.³⁰

View 2 focuses on the word ‘oneness’ and the difference between the words that could have been used to express oneness. While ‘singularity’ (*wāḥidiyya*) is applicable to creation as it indicates numerical oneness, the word used in the supplication is ‘uniqueness’ (*waḥdāniyya*). This is the same word used in the tradition attributed to Imām ‘Alī when he says: ‘And [secondly] if one says He, Mighty and Majestic, is unique, meaning He is not divisible in His existence, or by the intellect or in our imagination, such is our Lord, Mighty and Majestic.’³¹ Such a distinction, then, serves as a springboard for the elucidation of what is meant by the Oneness of God outside the realm of number as it distinguishes another way of looking at the meaning of oneness as uniqueness, where being unique does not mean being numerically one. However, a question that then arises concerns the role of the genitive ‘*adad* (number) in the statement with this distinction between singularity and uniqueness, as opposed to the genitive *ma‘nā* (meaning) used in the tradition attributed to Imām ‘Alī. Since views 5 and 6 also have the function of distinguishing the oneness of creation from the Oneness of God, it seems as though these two views sat better with the commentators than view 2 as a linguistic basis to depart from the outward attestation to numerical oneness.

While some of the other views are more commonly found in the commentaries, Sayyid Shubbar specifically traces view 7 to Sayyid ‘Alī Khān al-Madanī, whose full name was Šadr al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ma‘sum al-Ḥusaynī al-Dashtakī al-Shīrāzī (1052–1118/1642–1706–7 or 1120/1708–9). He wrote an important commentary on the *Šaḥīfa* called *Riyāḍ al-sālikīn fī sharḥ Šaḥīfat Sayyid al-Sājidīn*. His intertextual reflection is unique in drawing attention to the rhetorical construct of the supplication. Al-Madanī specifically relates the statement ‘diverse in states, constantly changing in attributes’ to ‘You have, O my God, numerical oneness’ positing an opposing relationship

30 See al-Madanī, *Riyāḍ al-sālikīn*, 4:295, where al-Madanī rejects this opinion on the basis that it is not apparent.

31 Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawḥīd*, 83.

between them.³² The first statement occurs as part of a paragraph which affirms that which is attributable to God, while the second statement occurs in the next paragraph that speaks of attributes for those other than God. The meaning of the first statement must be opposed to the meaning of the second statement as each line of the paragraph corresponds to a line in the following paragraph in an opposing way. This is similar to the structure of the other related statements such as '[You have] the property of eternal power', which is related to the statement 'overcome in his affair' in the next paragraph.³³ The full paragraphs have been translated by William C. Chittick as follows:

10- To Thee, my God, belongs the Unity of number,
the property of eternal power,
the excellence of force and strength,
the degree of sublimity and elevation.

11- Everyone other than Thee is the object of compassion in his lifetime,
overcome in his affair,
overwhelmed in his situation,
diverse in states,
constantly changing in attributes.³⁴

Al-Madanī considers the statements in paragraphs 10 and 11 related as what is attributable to God, on the one hand, is opposed to what is attributable to everyone other than Him. The meaning of 'You have, O my God, numerical oneness' is opposite to 'Everyone other than Thee is ... diverse in states, constantly changing in attributes'. This means that different attributes and states when speaking about God refer to different concepts and expressions, not in real changes in attribute or state as the Attributes of God are at one with His Essence. There is no multiplicity as God's Essence is simple and One.³⁵ Al-Madanī continues to elucidate the link between God's Attributes and Essence in the rest of his explanation.³⁶ Perhaps another intertextual argument can be found in the last statement of the supplication in which God is extolled above any similitude or likeness.³⁷ Al-Madanī contributes to conceiving the need to interpret an outward commitment to numerical oneness differently through an intertextual discussion, and uses the impossibility of change to show that numerical oneness is not intended.

³² al-Madanī, *Riyāḍ al-sālikīn*, 4:295.

³³ Ibid., 295–96.

³⁴ Imām Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, *The Psalms of Islam: al-Sahīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, trans. William C. Chittick (London: The Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 1988), 101–2.

³⁵ al-Madanī, *Riyāḍ al-sālikīn*, 4:296.

³⁶ Ibid., 296–97.

³⁷ Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, *The Psalms of Islam*, 102.

But does the argument follow? How is change related to numerical oneness? For an object to experience a change in state it must have potential for the next potentially active state. Drawing on philosophical interpretations on the nature of God, it is clear that God is not subject to change because there is no potential perfection that He can achieve. He is necessary from every perspective (*wājib min jamīʿ al-jihāt*). His perfection is superabundant and beyond limit, in a state of action, not potential. Any state of potential would limit a current state of action as it is from the limit of a particular state of action that a potential for something beyond emerges. This is the link between change and numerical oneness. For God to change He needs to be limited, and for God's oneness to be numerical He needs to be limited. Beings other than God change and may be numerically one as they are limited. But God is unlimited and so cannot change or be numerically one.

Of the commentaries that predate Sayyid Shubbar's analysis, Mīr Damād's (d. 1041/1631) explanation has the same purport as views 5 and 6 in that he establishes numerical oneness for God but in a different way to creation. At the same time he uses the concept of numerical oneness being the shadow of true oneness expressed in view 4.³⁸ The grandson of al-Shahīd al-Thānī, 'Alī b. Zayn al-Dīn b. Muḥammad al-ʿĀmilī (d. twelfth/ eighteenth century), in his commentary explains that numerical oneness cannot apply to God; rather, it is from His Oneness that numerical oneness can be conceived even if not actualised. The Oneness that is attributable to God is that He is One in every aspect, which is an attribute not found in anyone other than Him.³⁹ Sayyid Niʿmatullāh al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1112/1700) uses views 1, 4, 5, and 6. He also quotes a tradition from Imām al-Riḍā in which the Imām is questioned about the premise that God has no likeness. If we can have a single human and a single God, isn't this a type of likeness? The Imām replies with the following:

O Faṭḥ, you are mistaken! May God make you steadfast! Similitude is in meaning, not in words. Singularity is an indication to that which is being spoken of. If you say that a human is one, you are speaking of one body which doesn't have a[n exact] likeness, but humans in themselves are not one. They have different muscles and colours. The different colours are variant. He has unequal parts that are divisible. His blood is not his flesh, and his flesh is not his blood. His nerves are not his sweat glands, and his sweat glands are not his nerves. His hair is not his skin, his whiteness is not his blackness, and similarly for the rest of creation. So a human is one in name, not one in meaning.

God—His Majesty be majestic—is One and there is no other one other than Him. There is no change or difference, increase or decrease in Him.

38 Muḥammad Bāqir Dāmād, *Sharḥ al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya al-kāmila* (Isfahan: Bahār-i qulūb, 2001), 273.

39 'Alī b. Zayn al-Dīn b. Muḥammad al-ʿĀmilī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya* (Tehran: Sāzamān tablighāt-i Islāmī, 2017), 441.

As for the human, he is created, fashioned, made up of different parts and substances even if he is brought together in one being.⁴⁰

It seems as though the origin of Fath's confusion is that the word 'one' is applied both to God and to other than God. The use of the same words led Fath to assume that the same meaning was implied. The Imām draws Fath's attention to the fact that the same word can be used for entirely different meanings. The context of the use of the word is important in deciphering the intended meaning. 'Singularity is an indication to that which is being spoken of.' God is not similar to His creation and so the words used for Him don't have the exact meaning as intended when referring to His creation. Mirroring the second valid conception of God as being simple, elucidated in the tradition attributed to Imām 'Alī in his answer to the Bedouin, Imām al-Riḍā then explains that a created being is not one in the same sense that God is one, as physical beings are made of parts; but God is not and He does not experience change like His creation. The argument from lack of change was also found in al-Madanī's argument in view 7 discussed above.

Perhaps Sayyid Shubbar untangled the various trains of thought within such explanations such that he managed to extract three views from Mīr Damād's two-paragraph elucidation. Indeed, most of these views are also summarised and some are elucidated further in Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Mūsawī al-Ḥusaynī's (d. 1240/1824)⁴¹ seminal commentary on the *Ṣaḥīfa: Lawāmi' al-anwār*. Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir was a contemporary of Sayyid Shubbar.⁴² He opts for view 5,⁴³ and his reasoning, beyond the grammatical use of the *yā' al-nisba*, is that both unveiling and reasoning suggest that both existence and oneness are essentially unified. The singularity of each thing is due to its specific instance of existence. Therefore, since God's existence is the reality of pure existence, which is neither general nor specific, universal, or particular, nor is it essential to anything else, without limit, and expansive of all that exists, it is *completely* unknown while being the most manifest and close. His Oneness, in the same way as His Existence, is also completely

40 al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:293–94.

41 Unfortunately, it seems that not much is known about Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir, also known as Mullā Bāshī, despite the seven works attributed to him. See Muḥammad Bāqir al-Mūsawī al-Shīrāzī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār al-'arshiyya fi sharḥ al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, 6 vols. (Isfahan: al-Zahrā', 2004), 6:14–27.

42 Prior to these authors, commentaries were written by al-Ka'fāmī (d. 905/1499), who was probably the earliest recorded commentator on the *Ṣaḥīfa*, with only the gloss of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Maṣṣūr al-Hillī (d. 598/1201) predating al-Ka'fāmī's efforts; a gloss by Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659); Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631); Ḥasan b. 'Abbās al-Balāghī al-Najafī, who started his commentary in 1105/1693; a partial commentary by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1698); Sayyid Ṣadr al-Dīn 'Alī b. Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Dashtakī al-Shīrāzī (d. 1120/1708); Ḥusayn al-Jilānī al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1129/1716); Abū al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad Ṭāhir b. 'Abd al-Ḥamid al-Fatūnī al-Nabāṭī al-'Āmili al-Iṣfahānī al-Gharawī (d. 1140/1727); a partial commentary by Mirzā Ibrāhīm b. Mīr Muḥammad Ma'ṣūm al-Ḥusaynī al-Tabrizī al-Qazwīnī (d. 1149/1736); among many more. See Muḥammad Muḥsin b. 'Alī Tihrānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*, 25 vols. (Qom: Ismā'īliyyān-i Qum va kitābkhānah-i islāmīya-i Tihrān, 1987), 13:345–59.

43 al-Shīrāzī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 4:82–98.

unknown, meaning that God is the only being that possesses *tawhīd*. It is therefore impossible to imagine a second, as the Oneness of God cannot be imagined in the first place.⁴⁴

4. Oneness and Existence

Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir continues his analysis to discuss the incoherency of numerical oneness for a being that is unlimited but pervades limited beings, not by being mixed with them, and transcends limited beings, without being detached from them.⁴⁵ Rather, 'there is nothing in existence except for His Essence, His Attributes, and His Actions. This is something which is not known except to the perfect from among the *'urafā'* (knowers).'⁴⁶ Since there is nothing that is without Him, all existential perfection is attributable to Him, as everything in existence is a manifestation of His perfections. Saying God has every type of oneness is like saying God has every type of existence. So, if another sentence, perhaps even more problematic than the one found in the *Ṣaḥīfa* is hypothesised, such as 'You have, O my God, contingent existence', it would not be an expression of God's existence being contingent, as that is impossible. Rather, it should be interpreted to mean that His existence encompasses all contingent existents. Contingent existence can be attributed to Him from this perspective. In the same way, since numerical oneness is attributable to creation, yet remains comprised by real oneness, it can be attributed to God.

In a separate treatise at the end of his commentary on this part of the supplication, Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir draws heavily on the theory and language of the theoretical mysticism of the school of Ibn al-ʿArabī and the transcendental philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā. He continues to clarify what is meant by this phrase by identifying three meanings for oneness based on three ways of looking at *wujūd*:

- (1) Pure Unity that is not connected to anything nor is it limited by any limitation. This is specifically applicable to His Essence, which has no Name, no trace, no limit, and no proof [because of its exaltation above the intellect].
- (2) Unity that is limited by permanent archetypes and quiddity.
- (3) Unity that is unlimited and dispersed. Its generality and encompassment is not such that it is universal or shared like intellectual concepts; rather, in another complex way, which only the people of insight understand, which is the oneness that encompasses everything not through mixing or by separation. This applies to all of the Attributes such as Power and Knowledge. It is this last type that is referred to in the phrase in the supplication.

44 Ibid., 87–88.

45 This classic paradox is taken from a report in which Imām ʿAlī is reported to have said: '[He] is with everything not accompanying it, other than everything not by separation' (*ma'a kulli shay' lā bi-muqārana wa-ghayr kulli shay' lā bi-muzāyala*). See al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, 40.

46 al-Shīrāzī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 88.

These ways of looking at *tawhīd* draw from the Breath of the All-Merciful (*al-naḥas al-raḥmānī*) elucidated in Akbarian Sufism.⁴⁷ The stage of Pure Unity identified as the first way of looking at existence corresponds to the first degree of the *naḥas* called the Degree of Non-dualistic Unity (*al-martaba al-aḥadiyya*), which is also sometimes referred to as the Unseen of the Unseen (*ghayb al-ghuyūb*). The degrees in the schema of the *naḥas* are degrees of manifestation and limitation, moving from the stage where nothing is manifest to the material world, in which the Names of God are the most manifest. The flip side of manifestation is that something manifest hides what is behind it and so the realms of the inner or unseen are in relation to the state of consciousness of the locus of manifestation. The first degree in the *naḥas* signifies the rule of Pure Unity, which precedes the process of manifestation and limitation. It dissolves any conception of multiplicity, such that even the Names are not distinguished from one another as they are all unlimited modes of the superabundant Essence. The simple distinction of one Name from another would involve an intellectual limitation which is not acceptable at this level of unity. This Pure Unity is the unity that can be attributed to God as it necessitates no partner, division, or composition.

The second type of oneness focuses on multiplicity. Drawing from Ṣadrā's philosophy, an existent's quiddity signifies the limitations of its existence. The discussion of the relationship between quiddity and the permanent archetypes is contentious.⁴⁸ The permanent archetypes signify a stage in the knowledge of God, where the specifics of the Names which constitute each individual manifestation are known to God, but are yet to exist in the extramental as external archetypes (*al-a'yān al-khārijīyya*). It is the permanent archetypes that give the external archetypes their specification. The permanent archetypes are the Names as they face creation and so never enter the realm of creation, similar to quiddity which does not exist or not exist in and of itself. They are permanent as the knowledge of God is not subject to change. The stage of the permanent archetypes is after a stage in which the Names are distinguished from one another in the Degree of Dualistic Unity (*al-martaba al-wāḥidīyya*). Created beings manifest perfections and hide others as the only way for an Attribute to manifest is if the other Attributes are hidden. While this way of looking at existence emphasises multiplicity, the concepts of quiddity and the permanent archetypes fall under theories which already specify the true oneness of that which they limit. It is through the lens of oneness that multiplicity is reconciled in both transcendental philosophy and Akbarian theoretical mysticism.

47 See Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 7–282; Sajjad H. Rizvi, 'The Existential Breath of al-Raḥmān and the Munificent Grace of al-Raḥīm: The *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* of Jāmī and the School of Ibn 'Arabī', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2006): 58–87.

48 See Zoheir Esmail, 'Between Philosophy and 'Irfān: Interpreting Mullā Ṣadrā from the Qajars to Post-revolutionary Iran' (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2015), 216–18.

The third type elucidates a balance between unity and multiplicity, not preferring one aspect over the other, yet affirming both through discussing unity as encompassing multiplicity. The idea of encompassing avoids attachment or detachment of the unifying aspect such that it does not sharply contradict or affirm multiplicity. As with all of the other Attributes, unity encompasses limitation as it transcends it. God's knowledge, while being presential is not limited by the limitations of corporeal presence. His power accounts for all that occurs within every realm, but at the same time it is not confined to any realm. His knowledge, power, unity, and all of His Attributes are transcendent as they are unlimited, but not detached entirely as every realm manifests these Attributes. They account for all perfection as there is no other source of perfection other than God, yet they are not confined to any locus of manifestation.

4. Concluding Remarks

Interpreting texts as a process to reconcile apparent inconsistencies is an important function of an intellectual tradition. The views presented in Sayyid Shubbar's *Maṣābīḥ al-anwār* provide us with a vista unto the visions of *tawḥīd* discussed by commentators on *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya* and the reconciliation of an outward attestation to numerical oneness with the wider scriptural and intellectual traditions which contest such a notion. It seems that the commentators were empowered in their reconciliations by the development of the mystical and philosophical traditions. This is reflected in the general increase in literature commenting on texts like the *Ṣaḥīfa* and *Uṣūl al-Kāfī* from the eleventh/seventeenth century and the refinement and clarity of thought in later commentaries like *Lawāmi' al-anwār* of Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Mūsawī al-Ḥusaynī. As such, this article and others like it, are windows into a garden of activity in which Shī'ī commentators engage with their scriptural sources through the lenses of philosophy and mysticism.

Reflections ranged from linguistics, intertextual analysis, and mystical theosophy but did not involve a critical assessment of the attribution of the supplication to Imām Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn. While different reconciliations were offered, through the course of critical engagement the coherency of certain interpretations ensured them a preferred position among commentators. This is one of the key advantages of intellectual frameworks that demonstrate their prowess in their ability to coherently explain dilemmas in a consistent manner, reflecting the intellectual indebtedness of commentators to their philosophical and mystical heritage. The endeavours of scriptural commentators in providing more substantial analysis using these frameworks has provided grounding for modern research which aims to retrace the roots of philosophical and mystical frameworks to scripture.⁴⁹

49 Muḥammad Javād Rūdgar, *Mabānī-yi 'urfān-i waḥyānī* (Tehran: Sāzmān-i intishārāt-i pajūheshgāh-yi farhang va andīshah-yi Islāmī, 2017).

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